

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATER SAFETY

Each year, portable heating equipment - a subcategory of heating fires that includes electric space heaters - is responsible for thousands of unnecessary deaths. If used improperly, space heaters can cause fire, electric shock, and electrocution.

As the temperatures drop during the winter holiday season, many families will increase their use of alternative heat sources, such as portable electric space heaters, to help warm their homes. If used improperly, this indoor heating equipment presents increased risk of fire, electric shock, and electrocution.

This fact sheet provides information to help ensure that electric space heaters are safely used and maintained in the home, and outlines safety precautions that can be taken to mitigate the hazards posed by indoor heating equipment this holiday season.



SPACE HEATER SAFETY TIPS

- Read the manufacturer's instruction manual before using any space heater. Check to make sure the heater bears the mark of a certified testing organization.
- Keep space heaters at least 3 ft. away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs.
- Keep space heaters away from areas with water. Check your manual to be sure the heater is intended to be used in locations such as bathrooms.
- Don't use space heaters in rooms where children are unsupervised. Children may stick their fingers or other objects through the protective guards, causing burns or shock.
- Do not use space heaters with extension cords; plug directly into an outlet on a relatively unburdened circuit.
- Space heaters have hot parts that can cause sparking. Do not use them in areas where flammable liquids such as gasoline or kerosene are used or stored.
- Space heaters are meant to supply supplemental heat. Do not use them to warm bedding, cook food, dry clothing or thaw pipes.



- Turn off, unplug, and safely store portable space heaters when not in use.
- When plugging in a space heater, make sure that the circuit can adequately and safely handle the added demand.
- Never remove the grounding feature on a plug by clipping or grinding off the third prong.
- If you do not have a three-hole outlet, use an adapter to connect the heater's three-prong plug. Make sure the adapter ground wire or tab is attached to the outlet ground.
- Check the cord before plugging in the heater. If frayed, worn, or broken, do not use it. Be sure to either have an electrician replace the cord, or replace the heater. Simply putting tape on the cord is not enough to prevent overheating and fire.

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATER SAFETY STATISTICS

- Heating equipment was involved in an estimated 53,000 home fires in the United States last year (NFPA).
- These fires accounted for 14% of all home fires and were responsible for an estimated 260 deaths, 1,300 injuries, and \$500 million in property damage.
- The peak months for residential portable heating fires are January and February.
- More than 25,000 residential fires every year are associated with the use of space or room heaters, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).
- In 2005, space heaters accounted for one-third (32%) of the home heating fires and three-fourths (73%) of home heating fire deaths (NFPA).
- Heating equipment placed too close to flammable materials, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses, or bedding, is the leading factor contributing to home heating fires and deaths.
- During the past decade, the CPSC has issued recalls of 32 electric heaters of all different types.
- Portable heating equipment fires account for only 10% of all heating fires; however, they are responsible for 30% and 40% of heating injuries and deaths, respectively (USFA).
- Thirty-three percent of people surveyed by ESFI admitted to keeping their space heaters running overnight, and 19% admitted to leaving them unattended.

The **Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI)** is dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety. ESFI is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by electrical manufacturers and distributors, independent testing laboratories, utilities, safety and consumer groups, and trade and labor associations. ESFI sponsors National Electrical Safety Month every May, and engages in public education campaigns and media outreach to help reduce property damage, injury and death caused by electrical accidents.

