

Loss Control Bulletin

*A Policy of Working Together
for a Safer Tomorrow*

Portable Heaters

Portable heaters are used extensively in the construction industry to permit work to continue during cold weather. They may also be used in many other occupancies as a supplemental heating system or where a permanent heating system does not exist or is out of service.

The main hazards associated with the use of portable heaters are fires, carbon monoxide poisonings and burns.

Portable heaters are the cause of many serious fires because of improper placement or lack of adequate safeguards. Maintaining adequate clearance from combustible materials is critical. Care should be taken to assure that winds cannot blow canvas, plastic or other combustible materials against heaters.

Heaters should only be used in a safe area. Do not use in tightly enclosed rooms where there is limited ventilation. Do not use in garages or workshops where there may be flammable/combustible liquids or combustible dusts.

Modern heaters burn more efficiently, reducing the presence of carbon monoxide emissions. However, proper ventilation must be provided.

Before using a portable heater refer to the manufacturer's guidelines for ventilation requirements, clearance from combustible material requirements and other safety precautions.

Safety Precautions

Portable heaters should be UL listed (Underwriters Laboratories) or certified by another Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory.

All units should have a substantial base to prevent tipover and should be placed on level ground. Units should not be placed on a combustible floor surface unless designed for that purpose. If so, proper clearance guidelines must be followed.

Tarpaulins used to provide temporary enclosure for heaters should be made of fire-retardant materials.

Portable heaters should not be exposed to weather elements unless the manufacturer indicates the unit can be used outdoors.

Keep heaters away from pedestrian traffic patterns to avoid tripping hazards, contact burns or ignition of clothing.

For liquid-fueled heaters, use only the approved fuel. Never use gasoline. Never refill a heater while it is hot. Only use approved containers, clearly marked for that particular fuel, and store them outdoors. Kerosene should be stored in a UL-listed safety container.

Purchase heaters that have an automatic shut-off control that stops the flow of fuel or power in the event the heater is tipped over.

Do not leave the heater unattended while it is in operation.

If using a portable electric heater, do not use extension cords or multi-plug power strips. Overheating of these devices could result in a fire. The heater should be plugged directly into an outlet. Cords should be kept out of traffic patterns so they do not present a tripping hazard which could also cause the unit to tip over.



Gas or oil fueled heaters should have an oxygen depletion sensor. The sensor detects when oxygen levels have reached an unsafe level and shut off the fuel supply to the heater.

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