

Space Heater Safety

Drafty house? Unheated workshop in a garage? Cold basement?

That's just a few of the reasons that people use small space heaters in their houses. However, the abuse of space heaters is a real concern. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 25,000 residential fires every year are associated with the use of space heaters, causing more than 300 deaths. Plus an estimated 6,000 people go to hospital emergency rooms for burn injuries associated with contacting the hot surfaces of room heaters, mostly in non-fire situations.

According to energy.gov, there are several simple steps you can follow to make sure you aren't a statistic. They include:

- Only purchase newer model heaters that have all the current safety features. Make sure the heater carries the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) label.
- Choose a thermostatically controlled heater, because they avoid the energy waste of overheating a room.
- Select a heater that matches the size of the room you wish to heat. Do not purchase oversized heaters. Most heaters come with a general sizing table.
- Place the heater on a level surface away from foot traffic. Be especially careful to keep children and pets away from the heater.

Most people purchase traditional electric space heaters, rather than combustion space heaters, which need to be vented. Although electric space heaters avoid indoor air quality concerns, they still pose burn and fire hazards and should be used with caution.

For convection (non-radiant) space heaters, the best types use a heat transfer liquid, such as oil, that is heated by the electric element. The heat transfer fluid provides some heat storage, allowing the heater to cycle less and to provide a more constant heat source.

When buying and installing an electric space heater, you should follow these general safety guidelines:

- Electric heaters should be plugged directly into the wall outlet. If an extension cord is needed, use the shortest possible heavy-duty cord of 14-gauge wire or larger. Always check and follow any manufacturer's instructions about the use of extension cords.
- Buy a unit with a tip-over safety switch, which automatically shuts off the heater if the unit is jostled or turned over.

Following these important tips will allow you to stay warm AND safe over the winter!