

# OCWR Fast Facts

## PORTABLE SPACE HEATERS

*Portable space heaters are devices used to heat small rooms or partially enclosed areas, such as cubicles and office spaces. A convection space heater pulls air from the room, warms the air over a heated surface, and then pushes it back out. This cycle results in warming the air in the area. Although they are useful devices, space heaters are high-wattage appliances that can become major fire hazards if not used properly.*



### Fire Hazards

The most serious hazards associated with space heaters are fire hazards.

According to the National Fire Protection Association’s December 2022 “Home Heating Fires,” heating equipment caused 13% of home structure fires and 18% of home fire deaths between 2016 and 2020, with space heaters accounting for one-third of those fires, as well as most of the deaths and injuries from all home heating equipment fires.

Portable electric heaters are high-wattage appliances that have the potential to ignite nearby combustible materials like curtains, sofas, rugs, paper, clothing, and flammable liquids. The majority of space heater fires occur when these types of combustible materials are placed too close to or come in contact with the heater, causing them to catch fire. Portable electric space heaters have a higher risk of fire than fixed electric heating devices, and should never be left on when unattended.

*Check with your employer to see if they allow space heaters in your workplace and, if they do, whether they have a list of approved devices.*

## Space Heater Selection and Use

When selecting and using a portable space heater in the workplace, consider the following:

- Check with your employer to see if they allow space heaters in your workplace and, if they do, whether they have a list of approved devices.
- Look for a space heater that has safety features such as a tip-over switch, overheat sensor, and touch sensor.
- The space heater should have a label that shows it has been tested in a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL).
- Before using the heater, make sure you read and understand the manufacturer's instructions and warning labels.
- Check the cord and plug for damage. Ensure the ground pin is in place. When plugging in the heater, make sure the plug fits snugly into the outlet. Loose outlets can be a fire hazard.
- Plug space heaters directly into a grounded wall outlet, not an extension cord or a power strip. Space heaters draw considerable electric current, which can shock you if not grounded, and which can also overheat extension cords and power strips. Average electric space heaters range from 400–1,500 watts.
- Never leave a space heater unattended. Turn the heater off before leaving your workspace, and never allow pets or children to play too close to a heater.
- Keep your space heater in a low-traffic area to avoid trips and falls.
- Keep space heaters away from flammable materials. Make sure space heaters are kept at least 3 feet away from anything that can burn.
- Space heaters should be kept away from water and wet environments to avoid electrical shock.
- Space heaters with missing or broken parts are not NRTL–approved and should not be used.



### Sources:

1. Richard Campbell, *Home Heating Fires*. National Fire Protection Association, December 2022. <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/US-Fire-Problem/Heating-equipment>.
2. CPSC Safety Alert: *Reducing Fire Hazards for Portable Electric Heaters*. Consumer Product Safety Commission. <https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/heaters.pdf>.



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