

## Portable Electric Space Heaters

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), space heaters account for more than 43% of home fires and 85% of home heating fire deaths in the U.S. More than half of these (53%) resulted from a fire where heating appliances were too close to combustible material. When used improperly, space heaters can be a fire threat to houses, offices, warehouses, and industrial spaces.

### Risk Elimination

The best course of action is to discontinue the use of portable electric space heaters and use a stationary heat source installed by a qualified professional. By eliminating the source, you eliminate the fire hazard all together. This offers the best protection possible.

### Types

There are many types of portable electric space heaters, some of which are more dangerous than others. For example, fan-forced heaters have a fan that blows air over hot metal coils, distributing heat. Open coil heaters are particularly dangerous, as they can significantly increase the risk of fire. Ceramic heaters have a ceramic heating element over which air is warmed to create heat. These are preferred over other types, as they generally create the lowest risk of fire.

Other, less common space heaters include oil or water-filled radiators. They have heated oil or water that travels through the heater, creating radiant heat. Infrared heaters have bulbs that produce heat. Whatever you choose, be sure that you follow the manufacturer recommendations and that the space heater has the following:

- A seal indicating that it is listed by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL) such as UL, FM, CSA, etc.

- A thermostat and overheating protection.
- A shutoff feature if it overturns.

### Safe Practices

- Never use a space heater that is suspected to be damaged.
- Place out of walkways on a flat, solid surface.
- Use in the right type of environment (*not used in dusty or wet locations*).
- Maintain a three foot perimeter free of combustible material.
- Plug directly into an outlet (*not an extension cord*).
- Never run the power cord under a rug or other combustible material.
- Check the power cord and outlet plate for excessive heat. If they are hot, immediately discontinue using the heater.
- Do not plug multiple electronics into the same outlet as the heater.
- Always unplug when not in use.

### Conclusions

The best way to protect yourself from the hazards of space heaters is to avoid their use. If they must be used, follow the manufacturer's instructions and use precautions so the risk of fire can be minimized.

### Contact Us

Contact your independent insurance agent or the Auto-Owners Loss Control Department to find out how we can help strengthen your risk management program.

Loss Control email support: [LossControlSupport@aoins.com](mailto:LossControlSupport@aoins.com)  
Loss Control Helpline: 855.586.5388

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