

## Portable, Electric Space Heaters

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The leaves are falling and that crisp bite is in the air that indicates colder weather and winter are just around the corner. But as you unpack and dust off those space heaters that you occasionally use in the draftier areas of your office, we'd like to remind you of some of the risks they pose and share some safety tips.

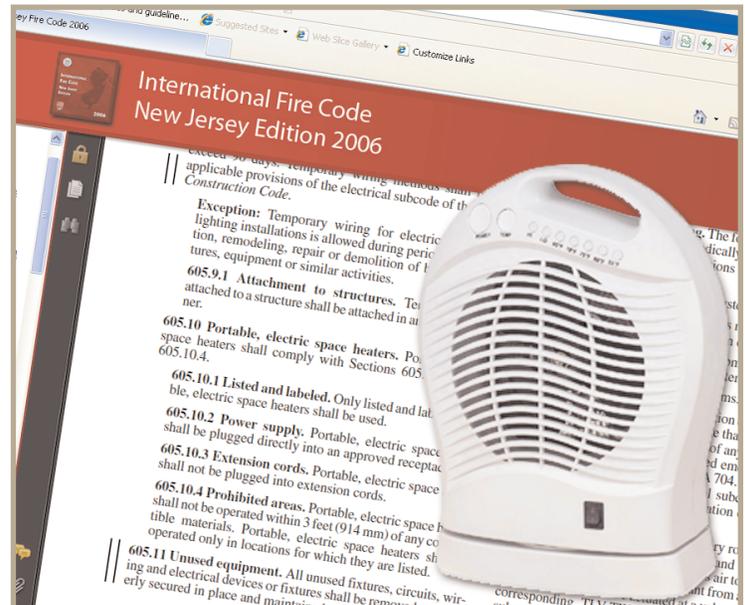
The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reported in 2007 that heating equipment was involved in an estimated 66,400 reported home structure fires, 580 civilian deaths, 1,850 civilian injuries, and \$608 million in direct property damage. In years 2003-2007, most home heating fire deaths (79%) and injuries (62%) and half of associated direct property damage involved stationary or portable space heaters, posing a much higher risk of fire, death, injury and loss per million users than central heating. Not following the manufacturer's guidelines when using a portable, electric space heater can pose a significant fire hazard to your office or home. Portable, electric space heaters can also pose the potential risk of electric shock and burn injury to children, older adults and pets if not used and maintained properly.

### Fire Code

Business occupancies, such as freestanding medical and dental offices and clinics, have no space heater restrictions. However, if a portable space heater is used, it must conform to sections of the **International Fire Code 2006, New Jersey Edition** currently enforced throughout the state. This code directly addresses the use of **portable, electric space heaters in Section 605.10**. Portable space heaters shall comply with Sections 605.10.1 through 605.10.4, as follows:

**605.10.1 Listed and labeled.** Only listed and labeled portable, electric space heaters shall be used.

**605.10.2 Power supply.** Portable, electric space heaters shall be plugged directly into an approved receptacle.



**605.10.3 Extension cords.** Portable, electric space heaters shall not be plugged into extension cords.

**605.10.4 Prohibited areas.** Portable, electric space heaters shall not be operated within 3 feet of any combustible materials. Portable, electric space heaters shall be operated only in locations for which they are listed.

### Insurance Protection

If you plan on using a portable, electric space heater in your office, Princeton Insurance recommends that you follow all applicable fire codes and the manufacturer's instructions and/or user guidelines, to ensure maximum protection against loss incurred by the use of an electrical device. Furthermore, Princeton Insurance risk management recommendations do not permit the use of portable propane, kerosene, or other fossil fuel heaters within an insured building. We also recommend that you register your new space heater with the manufacturer as soon after purchase as possible, so that you will be notified of any safety related issues that may develop over time.

### Additional Safety Requirements

- Be sure your electric space heater is Underwriter's Laboratory or Factory Mutual approved.
- Don't place the cord under a rug, or set items on top of the cord.
- Check the cord and receptacle on a regular basis for signs of normal wear and use (cord cracks, frayed wires, and hot spots.) Any deformity of the plug end or receptacle due to heat should warrant a call to a qualified electrician.

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- Locate the unit in an open area and away from an exit pathway. The Consumer Products Safety Commission advises to place the heater on a level, hard and nonflammable surface (such as ceramic tile floor) and not on rugs or carpeting.
- Be sure to maintain at least 36" clearance from furniture, papers, clothing, drapes, computer equipment, files, or other combustible materials and from the front, top, sides and rear of the portable, electric space heater.
- Never place anything around, above or in direct contact with the unit.
- The portable, electric space heater should have a protected grill, tip-over switch, touch sensor and overheat protection manufactured into the unit. This means that the unit will shut off if knocked over, if the grill is touched or if the unit overheats. It should also have an adjustable temperature control.
- Electric space heaters should be used only under direct supervision and should not be left unattended. If left unattended, children and older adults could be at risk for burn injuries.
- The portable, electric space heater should be unplugged from the wall receptacle when the office is closed and/or unsupervised. Allow the space heater to cool off prior to storing.
- Don't use a portable, electric space heater in a wet location, such as near a bathroom sink or in the presence of flammable or combustible liquids like gasoline, paint thinners, cleaning solvents, or fuel oils.
- Have a working smoke detector in the immediate vicinity of the space heater.
- Openings on the unit should be kept clean and clear for proper airflow through and around the unit.
- If the space heater is damaged in any way, have it inspected by a qualified electrician or appliance repair person.

Portable, electric space heaters pose a significant risk of fire within an office, which can result in the loss of life, or the destruction of property. Staff and patients' personal safety can be compromised by the use of any portable, electric space heater if the manufacturer's operating instructions are not followed on a routine basis. If you must use a portable, electric space heater in your office or home this winter, following the minimum safety requirements listed above will afford you with the best protection.

*Note: The NFPA Life Safety Code typically prohibits the use of portable space heaters in healthcare occupancies such as hospitals, nursing homes, and ambulatory occupancies such as surgery centers. Also, some individual municipalities may have more restrictive requirements on the use of portable, electric space heaters and should be consulted prior to purchasing a portable, electric space heater for your office. ❖*

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