

Keeping Your Toosies Toasty Could Cost You...

Everyone likes to be warm and comfortable in the winter. Portable space heaters can be found tucked under many of the desks in any office space. However, this comfort can come at quite a price – these conveniences pose a major workplace fire safety hazard. Fires can be caused by space heaters without adequate safety features, when placed near combustibles, or when improperly plugged in.

Statistics about damage caused by space heaters in the workplace are not readily available, but there is a great deal of information available on the effects of poorly utilized space heaters in the home. For example, Massachusetts launched a campaign last winter that examined cases over a four year period, from 2006 to 2010. In that period, fifty-nine (59) space heater fires were reported to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. While not frequent, these fires are deadly. One of every seven space heater fires causes a fatality. These fires caused eight civilian deaths, nine civilian injuries, 18 fire service injuries and an estimated dollar loss of \$3.5 million. The average dollar loss for a space heater fire is \$46,567. Twenty-two percent (22%) of these fires were caused when combustible materials such as magazines, newspapers, clothing or furniture were too close to the heater, and another 5% were caused when rugs, carpets or mats were under or too close to the heater.

While many offices have issued a ban on space heaters, people continue to bring them into the workplace. If you are you, or someone you know has a heater stashed under the desk, take a look at the information below, provided by the Massachusetts State Fire Marshall.

When Purchasing a Heater

Space heaters can be used safely in the workplace if proper precautions are taken. When purchasing a space heater, look for:

- Approval by an OSHA recognized laboratory (such as Underwriters Laboratory, Factory Mutual, or the Canadian Standards Association).
- A tip-over switch that automatically shuts off the heater in the event that it is knocked down.
- Kerosene heaters are illegal in many states. You should only buy an electric heater.



Placement of the Space Heater

Be sure to place the heater at a safe distance – 3 feet or more – away from combustible materials. These include:

- Damaged power cords
- Excessive wiring
- Stacks of paper
- Wood or other combustibles
- Clothing

Additional Tips

Space heaters should **NOT** be used if:

- An extension cord is needed, as it may not be properly rated for the device. If you must use an extension cord, make sure it is a heavy duty cord marked with a power rating at least as high as that on the label of the heater.
- There are missing or broken parts, like knobs, grills, or stands.
- There is water nearby. Never use them near a sink or in the bathroom.
- You need to leave the area. Space heaters should never be left unattended.

