



# CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

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Your Partner in Risk Management

## Space Heaters

As the temperature drops outside, the use of space heaters inside rises dramatically. According to the National Fire Protection Association, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February, and trails only cooking equipment in home fires year-round. In non-residential settings, heating equipment is the fifth leading cause of structural fires overall.

These numbers tell us that the hazards of using electric space heaters are real. They include fires and burns caused by contact or close proximity to the heating element, as well as fires and explosions caused by defective wiring or overloaded circuits.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has worked with the industry to increase safety with new performance requirements. Space heaters used in the office setting should possess the following safety features:

- Choose heaters that have been tested and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Heating element guard - to protect against contact burns and fires.
- Automatic shut-off/ Timer - the heater will automatically turn off if accidentally left on passed the set amount of time.
- Tip-over switch - the heater will turn off until turned upright again.
- Indicator light - new heaters have this feature to notify users that the unit is plugged in or is turned on.
- Infrared or Proximity sensors - this is an optional feature that turns a heater off when objects come too close. This would reduce the risk of burns or ignition of combustibles.

Employees using space heaters should practice the following safety guidelines:

- Never use propane, kerosene, gas fired, or wood burning space heaters indoors.
- Heaters should have a three foot safety zone. They should be kept three feet from flammable materials such as office furniture, paper, and clothing.
- The heater should be placed on the floor.
- Heaters should be turned off when the employee leaves the area. Absolutely no space heaters should be left on after hours.
- The cord should not be in the path of travel to prevent tripping as well as cord damage.
- Avoid using extension cords. If an extension cord is necessary, use only grounded, three pronged cords that have been UL listed, and that has sufficient amp rating for the heater.
- Follow all manufacturer recommendations for the heater.

Additional resources may be found from the following organizations:

The National Fire Protection Association  
The Consumer Product Safety Commission  
Underwriters Laboratories Inc.

[www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)  
[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)  
[www.ul.com](http://www.ul.com)