

Safe Use of Portable Electric Space Heaters



The use of portable electric space heaters is regulated by Section 604.10 of the California Fire Code. As the weather cools off, people often turn to the use of space heaters in order to maintain a comfortable work environment. You should first check to see if space heaters are allowed to be used in your workspace. If you are allowed to use space heaters, then it is important to follow the fire safety requirements from Section 604.10 of the California Fire Code.

First of all, space heaters are required to be listed and labeled. A listed space heater is one that is registered with the listing agency such as UL (Underwriters Laboratory) or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratory) and has passed a rigorous testing process to ensure that the space heater meets a specific standard. The nationally recognized standard for space heaters is UL 1278. In order to ensure that your space heater is listed it is required to be labeled by the listing agency. The label as shown must show that the heater conforms to UL Standard 1278. See the label below.



A space heater that conforms to UL 1278 will include the following safety features:

- The space heater must have a thermostat for heat regulation. Heaters without thermostats (e.g., simple "on/off" or "high/low" switches) are not permitted.
- Space heaters must have a tip-over shutdown feature. If the heater is knocked over, the unit must automatically shut off.
- Space heaters that are not equipped with a tip-over shutdown feature must have overheat protection, which will automatically shut the unit off if there is an overheat situation.

Once you have determined that your space heater is listed and labeled in accordance with UL 1278, it is important to safely use the space heater in order to prevent an



accidental fire. The following safety guidelines will help to ensure that you use your space heater in a safe manner:

- The heater may be placed only on the floor. Heaters located on filing cabinets, tables, desks or other surfaces are more susceptible to being knocked over, resulting in accidents or fires.
- Heaters may only be plugged into an approved receptacle with a circuit sufficiently capable of handling the amperage draw of the heater and other equipment on the circuit.
- Use of extension cords or other indirect means of providing power is not allowed.
- Heaters may not be used in areas where flammable liquids are in use or stored.
- Keep the heater away from water and out of damp locations.
- Maintain minimum clearance 3 feet or as specified by the manufacturer from combustible materials.
- Inspect the heater and power cord for broken or damaged parts. Never operate a heater with obvious or suspected damage.
- Electric cords must be kept out of foot traffic paths to prevent tripping.
- Do not run the heater's cord under doors, rugs, or carpeting. This can damage the cord and/or hide damage to the cord.
- The heater must be turned off any time the room or area being heated is unoccupied, especially at the end of the workday.

If you should have any questions regarding the use of electric space heaters, please feel free to contact me. In the next issue of "From the Ground Up", we will discuss common deficiencies related to the means of egress.

Author: Martin Von Raesfeld
mvonraesfeld@stanford.edu
(650) 725-6933.