SAFETY SHORTS

DON'T BURN DOWN THE OFFICE - PORTABLE HEATER HAZARDS

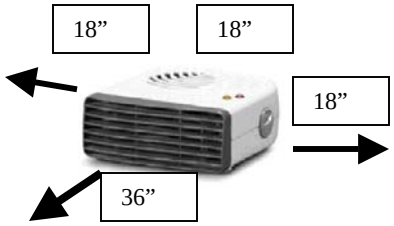

Portable electric and fuel-fired heaters have grown in popularity over the past two decades. This has come at a great cost, however. Misuse and malfunctions of portable heaters now account for one fifth of all structural fires. Over 30,000 people are injured and killed each year in the U.S. from portable heater related fires.

Most safety professionals and fire officials recommend that you simply not use portable heaters in homes and offices. However, since they are found in many buildings and require strict attention to prevent mishaps, here are some pointers to avoid having a heater-caused fire.

1. ***Unvented*** fuel fired heaters, like the kerosene heaters pictured below, are prohibited from public buildings under Maine law. These should **never** be used in municipal owned or operated buildings.

2. Make sure that your heater hasn't been the subject of a safety recall. Many are each year. Check the Consumer Product Safety Commission web site at: http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prerel.html

3. Every heater has a minimum clearance distance to combustible material that must be strictly adhered to. For ceramic disc and fan type heaters, this is typically 3 feet in front of the heater and 1.5 feet on the other three sides and above. Refer to your operator's manual for exact requirements. Heaters can easily ignite paper, cloth and other lightweight material. Heaters that are too close to heavier material, like wood, carpet, and plastic can slowly reduce their ignition points until a fire occurs after days or even weeks of heater use.



4. One common location for smaller electric heaters is under desks. This is a potentially hazardous place for them. It is difficult to maintain proper clearances. Paper and other highly combustible material can accidentally fall or be kicked into the clearance area around the heater. Also, many of these heaters are not approved for use on carpet.

5. Even one portable electric heater will load a typical office electrical circuit to near capacity. If other electric devices are on the circuit, it can easily overload it. Check for circuit breakers that feel warm. If they do, there is a serious risk of an electrical wiring fire. A qualified electrician should be consulted to verify that a circuit can handle an electric heater.

6. DO NOT use extension cords with electric heaters. This greatly compounds the risk of fire!

7. Use only heaters with "tip over protection" that shut off automatically when tilted. Unplug or shutoff at night and when not in use.