

Use of Portable Indoor Space Heaters

University of Wisconsin System buildings are operated under University of Wisconsin System and State of Wisconsin policies and regulations. The use of indoor space heaters is strictly limited due to risk of fire and concerns for energy consumption.

This policy on the use of indoor space heaters is written by the Office of Risk Management, University of Wisconsin System Administration, and applies to University of Wisconsin System personnel and campuses.

Definitions

Space heater: A space heater is a self-contained device for heating an enclosed area.

Scope

This policy applies to the use of portable space heaters in indoor settings (offices, workshops, etc.) within UW System buildings or other buildings used by UW System employees.

This policy is meant to outline the minimum requirements for the use of portable indoor space heaters. Individual UW System campuses may use a campus-specific policy that meets the minimum requirement of this policy, and may set more stringent requirements.

The local fire inspector may further restrict use of portable indoor space heaters per local fire code or ordinance.

This policy does NOT apply to the following:

- The temporary use of portable heaters for construction, outdoor settings, or industrial/research support applications is outside the scope of this policy. Use in these circumstances should be governed by the work hazard planning process in place at the campus.
- Non-portable area heaters that are wired or plumbed into the building utilities by the campus facilities department or included in building construction are not covered under this policy.
- Heated footrests or heated floor mats of 200W or lower power are not considered space heaters under this policy.

Limited use approval

Appropriate adjustment of the building heating system should always be the preferred option for meeting the heating needs for employees, students and guests in UW System buildings. When this is infeasible, campuses shall have the authority to approve the use of certain space heaters in limited

situations, such as where target temperatures cannot be maintained, for specific health needs, or for other extenuating circumstances. Under limited use approval, the selection and use of the space heater should follow the criteria in the *Safety and use requirements for space heaters* section, below.

Target temperature not maintained

If the central building heat system is unable to maintain a target work temperature, it may be determined that it is necessary to allow a space heater for temporary, supplemental heat until the comfort concern can be permanently resolved.

Specific health needs

The reason for the exemption should be documented. For example, if there is a medical reason, a document from a medical provider should be provided.

Other extenuating circumstances

The campus should designate a person or department with the authority to handle other circumstances that may require the temporary use of portable indoor space heaters.

Safety and use requirements for space heaters

It is essential to ensure the safe and responsible use of the portable space heater in order to reduce the risk of fire. In the event an exemption is granted, only space heaters meeting the following criteria are permitted:

Product design

Electrically powered

- The heater must be electrically powered and designated as approved with a nationally recognized testing laboratory mark [common marks include Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or FM Global Technologies (FM)]. Other nationally recognized testing laboratories may certify these products; see <https://www.osha.gov/dts/otpca/nrtl/nrtlmrk.html> for more information.
- Liquid-fuel (propane, kerosene) space heaters are not permitted.



Thermostat

- 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.

Tip-over protection

- Space heaters must have a tip-over shutdown feature. If the heater is knocked over, the unit must automatically shut off.

Overheat protection

- Space heaters must have overheat protection, which will automatically shut the unit off if there is an overheat situation.

Operating requirements

Approved space heaters may be used only if the following conditions are met:

Placement

- The heater may only be located 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 placed on circuits sufficiently capable of handling the amperage draw of the heater and other equipment on the circuit. Campuses may set power limitations on approved heaters.
- Heaters may not be used in areas where flammable liquids are in use or stored.
- Student-owned space heaters are not allowed in the campus residence halls or other campus student living facilities.
- Keep the heater away from water and out of damp locations.
- Maintain minimum clearance distances as specified by the manufacturer. Combustible or flammable materials must be kept away from the heater.

Check for...

- Inspect the heater for broken or damaged parts. Never operate a heater you suspect is damaged.
- During use, check frequently to determine if the heater plug or cord, wall outlet, or faceplate is hot. If the plug, outlet, or faceplate is hot, discontinue use of the heater, and have a qualified electrician check and/or replace the plug or faulty wall outlet(s). If the cord is hot, disconnect the heater, and have it inspected/repaired by an authorized repair person.

Power cord

- Heaters must be plugged directly into a wall receptacle. Use of extension cords or power strips is not allowed. Electric cords must be kept out of foot traffic paths to prevent tripping.
- Never run the heater's cord under doors, rugs, or carpeting. This can damage the cord, causing it and nearby objects to burn.

Other

- The heater must be turned off any time the room or area being heated is unoccupied, especially at the end of the workday.

Other applicable policies

In 2006, the Department of Administration issued the State of Wisconsin Energy-Use Policy. Two items in the policy pertain to use of portable indoor space heaters on UW System campuses:

1. Work area target temperatures are dictated by winter thermostat settings (68°F while open for business, 60°F during unoccupied hours)
2. The policy seeks to eliminate the use of space heaters

References for this policy

UW-Milwaukee: [Use of Space Heaters](#) (from 12/12/2013)

UW-River Falls: [Space Heaters \(AP-03-104\)](#) (from 12/12/2013)

University of Louisville: Space Heater Policy, issued November 1, 2013

United States Fire Administration: [Heating Fire Safety: Wood Stoves, Space Heaters and Fireplaces](#)

US Consumer Product Safety Commission: [Reducing Fire Hazards for Portable Electric Heaters](#)

State of Wisconsin Department of Administration: State of Wisconsin Energy-Use Policy (2006)