Safety Guideline

SG 27.01: Use of Portable, Electric Space Heaters

Approved 10/08/2026

PURPOSE

Portable, electric space heaters, when used properly, can provide an additional degree of comfort over and above the facility's heating system. Unfortunately, with the use of these heaters comes the increased risk of fire, property loss, and potential personal injury. The purpose of this guideline is to ensure the appropriate and safe use of portable, electric space heaters by minimizing fire hazards, preventing electrical overloads, and ensuring compliance with the International Fire Code.

Before using a portable, electric space heater, one should first report uncomfortable conditions, such as inadequate heating, to Campus Services to determine if adjustments can be made to the facility's HVAC system. At locations where MSU does not maintain the building's HVAC system, one should report these concerns through their supervisor to the party responsible for building maintenance.

SCOPE

This guideline applies to all portable, electric space heaters used to provide additional heat and comfort over and above the facility's heating system in any facility owned, leased, or otherwise controlled by MSU.

DEFINITIONS

Portable, Electric Space Heaters – A small, portable heating device that uses electricity to produce heat. These devices are typically used to provide supplemental heat to small areas.

Overheat Protection – An automatic feature that shuts off the heater if it begins to overheat, helping to prevent fires.

Tip-Over Switch – A safety feature that automatically turns off the space heater if it is knocked over or tilted beyond a certain angle.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Employees are responsible for ensuring that any portable electric space heater they use complies with this guideline and is operated safely.

Supervisors are responsible for addressing observed noncompliance within their areas.

Environmental Health & Safety may provide guidance regarding appropriate heater selection, placement, and use and may require removal of a heater when its use presents a safety hazard.

PROCEDURES

Selection of Heaters

1. Only portable, electric space heaters with automatic tip-over switches and overheat protection are permitted.

2. A portable, electric space heater must be listed and labeled (UL 1278 or equivalent) by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL) to ensure it meets safety standards. Notable recognized NRTLs that test portable, electric space heaters in accordance with UL 1278 include Underwriter Laboratories (UL) as well as Intertek Testing Services (ETL).

3. Portable, electric space heaters must be in good working order.

Use of Portable, Electric Space Heaters

1. Never operate a heater you suspect is damaged. Before use, inspect the heater, cord, and plug for damage. Follow all manufacturer operation and maintenance instructions. Damaged or malfunctioning space heaters must be taken out of service.

2. Heaters must be placed on a flat, stable, nonflammable surface away from combustible materials. Avoid using heaters on furniture or elevated surfaces.

3. Heaters must not be placed underneath desks, within any means of egress (including exit routes, doorways, corridors, or aisles), or any location that may obstruct pedestrian traffic, emergency egress or present a trip hazard.

4. Heaters should be placed a minimum of 3 feet (3’) from any combustible materials, including, but not limited to, paper products, upholstered furniture, curtains, and other items that can readily burn.

5. Heaters must be monitored during operation, and must not be placed in unattended areas, such as storage rooms or other unoccupied areas.

6. Heaters must be plugged directly into a wall outlet. Extension cords or surge protectors are not permitted, as they can lead to electrical overload and overheating.

7. Units must be unplugged when turned off when the area is left unattended (i.e. operating when no responsible individual is actively present in the room to monitor the unit).

8. Portable electric space heaters are strictly supplemental heating sources and are not to be used as permanent facility heating solutions.

PROHIBITED LOCATIONS

Portable, electric space heaters are prohibited in any unattended area along with the following high-risk environments:

- Residential & Student Living:
  - Residence Halls
  - Faculty and Staff Housing
  - Any Housing Leased or Owned by MSU

- Unattended & Utility Spaces
  - Storage Rooms and Closets
  - Custodial Closets
  - Mechanical, electrical, and telecommunication rooms
  - Loading docks, shipping/receiving zones, and mailrooms

- High-Hazard & Specialized Environments
  - Laboratories
  - Chemical Storage Areas
  - Agricultural research facilities
  - Industrial Shops
  - Art Studios and Maker Spaces
  - Patient Care Clinics and Animal Containment Facilities
  - Childcare Centers, Preschools, and Specialized Therapeutic Settings

- Public & Egress Pathways
  - Corridors, stairwells, and building lobbies
  - Athletic Facilities, Gymnasiums, and Locker Rooms

- Wet Environments
  - Restrooms
  - Breakrooms
  - Kitchens

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Emergency situations may arise where the use of portable, electric space heaters is necessary to protect university resources from extreme cold. Such usage may include prohibited locations and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as authorized by a Unit Director after consultation with Environmental Health & Safety.

APPROVAL AND REVIEW

This Safety Guideline was approved by the MSU Workplace Safety Committee in accordance with OP 03.06 Workplace Safety. It will be reviewed every four years (or whenever circumstances require an earlier review) by the MSU Workplace Safety Committee.