

Memo

July 9, 2025

To: Michelle Stomboly-Lorenzo - Director of Licensure and Certification, Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services

From: Kristen McDonough, PE (Jensen Hughes); Kurt Ruchala, PE (Jensen Hughes)

Subject: Space Heater Use in Group Homes

This memorandum addresses the applicable regulations and best safety practices regarding the use of space heaters in group homes licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS), and the associated safety considerations and best practices for doing so. This memo assumes the space heaters that would be used in DDS group home facilities would be portable electric space heaters and therefore does not address other types of space heaters, which may be subject to different requirements.

The use of electric space heaters does not appear to be restricted in Group Home occupancies. Portable electric space heaters are regulated by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code (527 CMR 1.00), which requires that they:

1. Be designed and located so that they cannot be easily overturned. (527 CMR 1.00 §11.5.3.2)
2. Be listed. (527 CMR 1.00 §11.5.3.3)

It is important for portable electric space heaters to be used in locations where they cannot be easily overturned, to prevent the potential for them to come into contact with combustible materials and start a fire. Considerations for safe placement of the heater would include locating it on a stable, level surface and out of the way of foot traffic and doorways.

All portable electric space heaters are required to be listed, which means that they need to have been tested and proven to comply with relevant safety criteria. These listings are typically provided by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory, such as UL Solutions (UL) or Intertek (ETL), and listed products will bear a marking from the testing laboratory.

Some additional safety considerations and best practices relevant to the safe use of portable electric space heaters are as follows:

1. Follow all of the manufacturer's instructions for safe use of the space heater. Each space heater's user manual provided by the manufacturer may include specific safety instructions that must be complied with at all times when using the product.
2. Keep combustible materials and furnishings such as upholstered furniture, curtains, mattresses, and other possessions at least 3 feet away from space heaters.
3. Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets. Never plug them into power strips or extension cords, as these devices may not be rated to accommodate the electric current that the space heater draws.

4. Space heaters should not be unattended when in use; they should be turned off and unplugged when occupants are not in the room or are sleeping.
5. Heaters with thermostats, overheat protection, and auto shut-off in case of tip over are recommended.
6. Keep children and pets away from space heaters while in use to prevent burns and potential tip-over accidents.

The use of portable electric space heaters is generally not recommended if another, permanently installed means of heating is available. If use of space heaters is necessary, it is recommended that all staff and occupants be provided with safety information and relevant manufacturer user manuals for the space heater prior to use.

For exemplary safety sheets, see Appendix A and B.

****End of Memo****

Appendix A – National Fire Protection Association’s Electric Portable Space Heater Safety Tip Sheet



When the weather turns cold, it can bring a chill into our homes. Portable space heaters have become a popular way to supplement central heating or heat one room. If you plan to use portable electric space heaters, make sure to follow these tips and recommendations:

HEATER CHECKLIST

- Purchase a heater with the seal of a qualified testing laboratory.
- Keep the heater at least 3 feet (1 metre) away from anything that can burn, including people.
- Choose a heater with a thermostat and overheat protection.
- Place the heater on a solid, flat surface.
- Make sure your heater has an auto shut-off to turn the heater off if it tips over.
- Keep space heaters out of the way of foot traffic. Never block an exit.
- Keep children away from the space heater.
- Plug the heater directly into the wall outlet. Never use an extension cord.
- Space heaters should be turned off and unplugged when you leave the room or go to bed.

Types of electric space heaters

Oil or water-filled radiator

Heated oil or water travels through the heater.

Fan-forced heater

A fan blows warm air over metal coils.

Ceramic heater

Air is warmed over a ceramic heating element.

Infrared heaters

Heat is created by infrared bulbs.

Fact

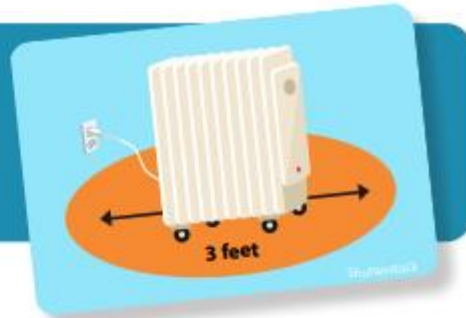
Two in five deaths in space heater fires involve portable electric space heaters.



NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION
The leading information and knowledge resource on fire, electrical and related hazards

Appendix B – Massachusetts Department of Fire Services' Space Heater Fire Safety Brochure

Space Heater Fire Safety



Space Heater Fires

Most space heater fires occur when flammable items such as bedding, clothing, or furniture are too close to the heater. They can also happen when the heater is plugged into an extension cord or power strip.

Safety Tips

If you must use a space heater for heat, use it as safely as possible.

- When buying a heater, choose one that has been tested and labeled by a nationally recognized testing company, such as Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) or Intertek (ETL).
- Keep the heater 3 feet away from drapes, furniture, or other flammable materials.
- Select a space heater that has an automatic shut-off switch that turns the device off if it tips over.
- Always plug a space heater directly into a wall outlet, not a power strip or extension cord.
- Place the heater on a level surface away from areas where someone might bump into it and knock it over.

- Never leave a space heater unattended or running while you sleep.
- Supervise children and pets when a space heater is in use.
- Keep electric heaters away from water. Never use them near a sink or in the bathroom.
- Portable kerosene and propane heaters are illegal for home use in Massachusetts.

Always plug a space heater directly into a wall outlet, not a power strip or extension cord.



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