



Residential Safety Advisory: Use of Portable Space Heaters in Homes Operated Under DDS-Licensed Residential Services

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In consultation with Jensen Hughes, Fire Protection Engineers

This advisory provides guidance to DDS-licensed providers on the safe and compliant use of portable electric space heaters in residential group homes. It summarizes applicable fire safety regulations and best practices developed in consultation with Jensen Hughes, a nationally recognized fire protection engineering firm.

Portable electric space heaters may be used only as supplemental heating sources during temporary cold spells or localized temperature drops. They should not replace or serve as the primary heating system within any DDS-licensed residence.

Regulatory Background

The use of portable electric space heaters in Group Home (R-3) occupancies is governed by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code (527 CMR 1.00).

Under §11.5.3.2–3, space heaters must:

- Be designed and located so they cannot be easily overturned.
- Be listed by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (e.g., UL, ETL) to confirm compliance with safety standards.

DDS Expectations and Best Practices

Providers electing to use portable electric space heaters must ensure the following safety measures are in place:

1. **Supplemental Use Only** – Use heaters only as temporary or supplemental sources of heat when additional warmth is needed. They must not replace the home’s permanent heating system.
2. **Stable Placement** – Place heaters on a flat, level surface, away from walkways, doorways, and high-traffic areas.
3. **Safe Clearance** – Maintain at least 3 feet of clearance from curtains, bedding, furniture, and other combustibles.
4. **Power Connection** – Plug heaters directly into wall outlets only. Do not use extension cords or power strips.
5. **Supervision** – Turn off and unplug heaters when rooms are unoccupied or residents are sleeping.
6. **Safety Features** – Use heaters with thermostats, overheat protection, and automatic shut-off if tipped over.
7. **Training & Documentation** – Ensure staff are trained on safe use, manufacturer guidance, and site-specific precautions before operation.

Additional Resources

[[Download Full Technical Memorandum – Jensen Hughes](#) (July 2025, PDF, includes Appendices A & B)]