



**Environmental Health & Safety  
Guidance Document**

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**Title:** Portable Heating Devices      **Author:** Occupational Safety and Fire Prevention  
**Original Date:**                      March 14, 2000                                      **Section:** Fire Safety  
**Revised Date:**                      January 4, 2018                                      **Number:** 3.0

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**1      DEFINITION AND PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to define what portable heating devices are and provide guidance for the safe use of such devices here at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth). It should be noted that the use of portable heating devices is not encouraged on the UTHealth campus. Portable heating devices should be used only as a last resort for temperature control. If temperature discrepancies exist, customers should contact the FIXT line at 713-500-3498 and report the temperature issue. All avenues will be explored by the Facility Controls Team to supply the desired room temperature within UTHealth recommended settings. Goal temperature settings on campus range from 70°F to 74°F.

Portable space heaters are movable, electrical heating units. Heat is generated by running an electric current through high resistance wires called heating elements. Alternate units using a fuel source are specifically prohibited. Regardless of the shape, size or type of electric heating element, virtually all power is converted into heat. The inherent hazard associated with heater use is the elements, which can reach extremely high temperatures. The heaters are operated by adjusting the unit's setting.

Using heating appliances such as these temporarily raise the temperature in the area. The building controls sense this and then attempt to further cool the area, causing the opposite effect of what the intention is. Portable heating devices also have a history of overloading the circuitry in the building and causing circuit breakers to trip. This outcome causes additional problems for the building, as well as the building occupants.

## 2 SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, researchers, students, and contractors at UTHealth.

Laboratory Spaces: Portable space heaters are strictly prohibited in laboratory areas or other areas where chemicals or combustible materials are stored.

Office Areas: **Portable space heaters used in these areas will require inspection and approval by Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) and Facilities prior to use and annually thereafter.**

- Never bring in a portable heating device as the first option for adjusting temperature in a space.
- Contact FIXIT before using a portable heating device.
- All heaters must be UL listed.
- All heaters must be equipped with an automatic shut-off device in the event a heater is tipped over or overheats.
- All heaters must be equipped with timers.
- A clear area of three feet in all directions of the heater shall be maintained and in accordance with the clearances shown on the approval agency label.
- Extension cords shall never be used to supply power to the heater.
- Modular furniture electrical systems must be rated to accommodate the additional electrical load supplied to the heater.
- If the addition of a portable heating device results in a tripped breaker, the device must be removed immediately.

## 3 COMPLIANCE

Periodic monitoring will be conducted by EH&S and Facilities to ensure heaters are being used in accordance with the conditions of this policy, if used at all. All heaters that are not in compliance must be taken out of service immediately.