Environmental Health & Safety
Occupational Safety and Fire Prevention
Guidance Document

Title: Portable Heating Devices

Original Date: March 14, 2000
Section: Fire Safety

Revised Date: December 20, 2016
Number: 2.0

GENERAL:

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 (UTHSC-H). It should be noted that Occupational Safety and Fire Prevention (OSFP), part of Environmental Health & Safety, discourages the use of these devices. These 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 inform the Energy Team of the temperature problem. All avenues will be explored by the Energy Team to supply the desired room temperature.

Portable space heaters are small, 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 at high or low, or they may come equipped with a thermostat.

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. These devices also have a history of overloading the circuitry in the building and causing circuit breakers to trip. This outcome also causes additional problems for the building, as well as the building occupants.
SCOPE:

This policy applies to all employees, researchers, students, and contractors at the University of Texas Houston Health Science Center.

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 EH&S prior to use.**

- 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.

COMPLIANCE:

Periodic monitoring will be conducted by Environmental Health & Safety 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.