



# ONTARIO TECH

## GUIDELINES FOR PORTABLE SPACE HEATERS ON CAMPUS

Space heaters can be inefficient means of temporary heating and may pose a **severe fire hazard** in the workplace when misused. It is one of the leading causes of fires and carbon monoxide exposures, causing about a third of all structural fires.

### Before Using a Portable Space Heater

- Check that the thermostat in the work area is set to the appropriate temperature.
- Submit a service ticket to confirm there is no existing building problem that should be resolved. The work area may be too cold because the building's system is not working properly.
- Ensure the electrical circuit can handle the increased load of a space heater. The increased load may result in a tripped breaker and the sudden loss of power to computers and other electrical devices.

### Appropriate Portable Space Heater

When choosing a portable space heater to use in the workplace, consider the following:

- Utilize heaters approved by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL), such as Underwriters Laboratory, Inc. (UL). Those not supported are **not to be used**.
- Space heaters **must** have an automatic safety switch that turns the unit off when tipped over.
- Space heaters must have a thermostatic control that ensures that the unit turns itself off and prevents overheating or creating an electrical hazard.
- Ensure the heater has a plastic face; this keeps the grille from heating to the point of burning the skin upon contact.
- The heater must have an [Electrical Safety Authority certification marking](#)

### Placement of the Portable Space Heater

- Place space heaters on level, flat surfaces. Never place heaters on tables, furniture, or area rugs.
- Plug the space heater directly into a wall outlet, and do not use an extension or power strip.
- Do not run cord underneath a rug or furniture.
- Space heaters should be kept from water and wet environments to avoid electrical shock.
- If an electric space heater is used in an area having running water (examples: kitchen or bathroom), it must be plugged into an outlet with a ground-fault circuit-interrupter (GFCI) to protect against electrical shock.
- Space heaters must be kept at least three feet away from combustible items, such as paper, furniture, etc.
- Restrict the location and use of space heaters. They should be utilized only in areas that can be adequately appropriately managed and controlled (no storage rooms) and where space heaters are visible and accessible.
- Never block an exit.
- Never use space heaters to dry flammable items such as clothing or blanket.
- High traffic areas should be avoided; this reduces the risk of:
  - Jarring
  - Displacement
  - Knocking over
- NEVER place anything on top of a space heater.





### General Guidelines

- Only one space heater may be plugged into an individual electrical circuit. The use of multiple heaters could overload the electrical circuit and cause injury or property damage.
- Space heaters should not be used if they have missing or broken parts, such as knobs, grills, or stands.
- Inspect the power cord before using it to make sure the cord is in good, serviceable condition and is not pinched, worn, or frayed.
- Always make sure to turn off and unplug space heaters every time an area is vacated.
- Space heaters should never be left on while unattended.
- Never use fuel-burning portable space heaters (propane or kerosene) in any enclosed space, as it can lead to deadly carbon monoxide exposure.

Please note that space heaters are only temporary means of **additional** heating. One should wear appropriate clothing in winter and try to minimize the usage of heaters. If you feel your office space/site is not sufficiently heated, it is recommended to report the issue through a service ticket to determine if any adjustments are possible before the use of a space heater.

### Related Legislation

- [Electricity Act and Regulations](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)

If you have any inquiries regarding Portable Space Heaters or this document, please contact the Office of Risk Management at [orm@ontariotechu.ca](mailto:orm@ontariotechu.ca).