



Portable Heaters at the Worksite

When winter arrives, temperatures dip below freezing and every bone in your body aches from the cold. You may be used to working in harsh weather. But occasionally, it sure is great to be able to warm up when there is a heater at the worksite. However, just like most other tools, portable heaters create hazards that must be controlled.

Before turning on a heater, read the manufacturer's operating instructions and follow them carefully. Heaters can be dangerous if they're placed in an enclosed area since they can produce carbon monoxide. This odorless and colorless gas can make you sick or kill you if it isn't vented properly.

Portable heaters should be monitored (don't leave them unattended) and should be outfitted with safety shut-off devices that stop the flow of fuel to the burner and the pilot light in the event that the flame goes out.

Portable heaters should never be placed near any combustible materials. The heat they produce can cause cardboard, packing material, plastic tarps, and flammable liquids to ignite and start a fire. You can be at risk too; it's dangerous to stand too close to a heater because your clothing could catch on fire.

Heaters give off enormous amounts of heat. That's what they're designed to do. But that heat can be a problem when re-fueling. Take time to shut them down and let them cool off before refueling them. Keep portable fire extinguishers nearby in case of a fire. Your safe bet is to prevent fires by working carefully around portable heaters.

Here is a list of questions you should consider before using portable heaters in the winter:

- Is there a way to alert everyone at the site in case of a fire? Can you contact the fire department?
- Are the fire exits clearly marked and free of clutter?
- Do you use electric heaters? If so, can the circuits they're connected to handle the load safely?
- Do you prohibit the use of extension cords to connect electric heaters to outlets?
- Are your portable heaters powered by natural gas? If so, do you know where the emergency shutoff is located?
- If you use propane to fuel heaters, do you always let them cool off before adding more fuel?
- Have you taken time to assess the risks, and control the hazards to reduce the likelihood of injuries or property damage?



SAFETY REMINDER

Portable heaters can be used to help you stay warm when it's cold outside. All it takes is proper planning, safe work practices, and knowing what to do in case of an emergency.