

Environmental Health & Safety
Occupational Safety and Fire Prevention
Guidance Document

Title: Portable Heating Devices **Program:** Occupational Safety & Fire Prevention

Original Date: March 2000 **Revised Date:** December 2025

GENERAL:

The purpose of this document is to define what portable heating devices are and provide guidance for the safe use of such devices within facilities at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth Houston). It should be noted that the use of portable heating devices is not encouraged on the UTHealth Houston campus at any time. Portable heating devices should be used as a last resort for temperature control only when the building controls are unable to maintain proper temperature standards. If there are temperature concerns, contact the FIXIT line at 713-500-3498 to report the temperature issue. All avenues will be explored by Facilities, Planning, Engineering and Auxiliary Enterprises personnel to supply the desired room temperature within UTHealth Houston recommended standard settings. **Any use of a space heater must be reviewed and approved by Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) in accordance with the guidelines set forth in this document, which have been reviewed and approved by the UTHealth Houston Safety Council. Additionally, please check with your building manager to determine if other local guidelines or prohibitions are in place regarding the use of space heaters.**

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 are the heating elements, which can reach extremely high temperatures and cause a fire.

Additionally, it is important to note that using heating appliances such as these temporarily raises the temperature in the area of use. The building HVAC controls sense this local temperature increase and then attempt to further cool the area, further complicating the temperature issue and wasting unnecessary energy and costs for the HVAC system to conduct this additional work. Portable heating devices may also overload electrical circuits in the building and cause circuit breakers to trip, which can lead to a local power outage to the device and other important equipment or devices.

SCOPE:

The guidance provided in this document apply to all employees, residents, students, contractors, and visitors within all buildings and facilities at UTHealth Houston.

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

Office and Clinic Spaces: Portable space heaters must have prior approval and require inspection by EHS prior to use.

Contact EHS at 713 500 8100 to request a review and seek approval for any space heater use on campus.

The following guidelines apply to any space heater use that is approved by EHS:

- Never bring in a portable heating device as the first option for adjusting temperature in a space
- Contact FIXT at 713 500 3498 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
- No children should be able to access the units at any time
- The portable space heater must never be left unattended or plugged in when not in use

COMPLIANCE:

Periodic monitoring will be conducted by EHS to ensure heaters are used in accordance with the conditions of this guidance document, provided all other temperature control options have been exhausted and approval has been granted. All heaters that do not adhere to this guidance must be taken out of service immediately.

CONTACTS:

Environmental Health and Safety:

Email: OSFP.Safety@uth.tmc.edu

Phone: 713 500 8100

Facilities, Planning, Engineering and Auxiliary Enterprises (FIXIT):

Email: fixit@uth.tmc.edu

Phone: 713 500 3498