

NEWS from CPSC

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

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Fire Hazard: Using A Portable Heater? Use Smoke Detector, Too

WASHINGTON --- Government safety experts warn that if you use a portable electric heater when you sleep, make certain there is a working smoke detector in the same room.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, (CPSC) fire departments responded to 2,600 residential fires involving portable electric heaters in 1986, these fires resulted in an estimated 130 deaths, 140 injuries and property losses totaling \$28.1 million.

CPSC offered the following precautions for using portable electric heaters safely:

- Always locate heaters at least three feet away from flammable objects such as bedding, furniture, curtains and drapes. Never use heaters to dry clothes or shoes. Don't place heaters where towels or other flammable objects could fall on the heater and start a fire.
- Place heaters on the floor, never on tables or furniture, since they may fall, dislodging or breaking parts of the heater.
- Do not use heaters in wet moist places, such as bathrooms, since critical parts of the heater may rust and could fail.
- String out electric cords on top of carpets or rugs; placing cords underneath anything can cause overheating.
- Do not use extension with electric heaters unless absolutely necessary; using an extension cord with high wattage appliances could start a fire. If you must use an extension cord, it must be marked #14 or #12 gauge; lower gauge numbers mean the wires are larger and can carry greater electrical current. For example, an extension cord sold for air conditioners will often have these lower gauge wires. Do not use a cord marked #16 or #18 gauge. Use only extension cord bearing the label of an independent testing laboratory.
- Be sure the plug firmly in the outlet. A loose plug may cause the plug and/or receptacle to overheat. Have a qualified repairman replace worn out plugs or outlets.
- Heaters draw considerable power, therefore, the cord and plug may feel warm. If the plug feels too hot to touch, unplug the heater and have a qualified repairman check for problems. If the heater and its plug are found to be working properly, have the outlet replaced.
- Sometimes, a heater is plugged into an outlet which is protected by ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). GFCIs are often placed on circuits where improper grounding can cause electric shocks to consumers. If you use a portable heater on a GFCI-protected circuit and GFCI trips, do not assume that the GFCI is broken or defective. Stop using the heater and have it checked by an appliance service center, even if the heater seems to be functioning properly.

- Broken heaters should be checked and repaired by a qualified appliance service center. Do not attempt to adjust or replace parts in the heater yourself.

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