

Toolbox Talks 2

058: Unsafe Acts: Heaters

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review company policies related to portable heating and cooking devices, including coffee pots and hot plates.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts related to the use of stationary and portable heaters.

Discussion notes:

Heater space requirements

- Circulating heaters require a minimum of one foot of space on each side and to the rear, unless otherwise noted on the device or in the manual.
- Radiant heaters require a minimum of three feet of space on each side and to the rear, unless otherwise noted on the device or in the manual.
- Both types of heaters, if fueled and ventilated, require at least 18 inches around the chimney connector.
- Allow enough space in front to avoid getting objects hot. Generally, this is a minimum of 10 feet. It could be considerably more, depending on the heater size and output.

Unsafe acts with properly-installed stationary heaters

- Violating the clearance space with combustible materials. They may ignite.
- Violating the clearance space with incombustible materials. The heater was designed to operate with a certain amount of space around it. Allow for proper air circulation.
- Allowing portable cords to run in front of heater grills or vents. When routing portable cords, be alert to heating elements that may later be energized.
- Using a heater as an appliance for cooking or heating food. The heater wasn't designed for this purpose. Use an approved hotplate or other device for this purpose.
- Setting things on heaters. Unless the heater has a special attachment or fixture for this purpose, setting items on it to warm them up or dry them out is unsafe.

Unsafe acts with portable heaters

- Violating clearances. The same problems with stationary heaters apply to portables.
- Setting the heater on the wrong surface. Most portable heaters cannot be set on wood floors, carpeting, or other combustible surfaces. A heater suitable for this kind of use will have extended legs, anti-tip mechanisms, and other special features.
- Closing off ventilation sources. Ensure the heater has adequate air for exhausting the fumes (unless, of course, it's an electric heater).
- Not allowing for movement of panels of a temporary structure made of canvas, tarpaulins, or other soft materials. A gust of wind can blow a soft panel into the heater. Even if you secure soft panels from moving within range of the heater, don't leave the structure unattended for long with the heater operating.
- Mounting a heater in any manner other than that expressly allowed by the manufacturer's markings or instructions.

Review and discussion

1. What are the company rules on hot plates, coffee pots, and food warmers of any kind?
2. Which of those items just mentioned are allowed on this site, and where can you use them?
3. What is the company policy on portable heaters brought from home? *[Note to Presenter: It is unlikely the company wants to assume liability for such devices brought from home. You need to let people know what to do if they want a portable heater.]*
4. How much space do you need on each side of a circulating heater? What about in back of it?

[Note to Presenter: A circulating heater is one that blows air, so it has a fan. A radiant heater does not have a fan].

5. How much space do you need on each side of a radiant heater? What about in back of it?
6. How much space should you allow in front of a heater? How do you know how much your particular heater requires? What if you need a heater in a space that is only 8 feet across at its widest point? *[Note to Presenter: Common sense applies, here. A large heater set on high output might provide blistering heat 15 feet away, so the 10 foot rule is insufficient. The space requirements are usually marked on the heater. If not, they are available on the manufacturer's Website or in the printed manual. If you don't have access to either of those, the manufacturer's phone number should be on the device. If you need a heater for a very small space, look at the small "personal heaters" that are commercially available. Another approach is to not use heaters at all, but to provide chemical warmers for toes and hands. Take the time to research the options for safely heating a given space or for keeping people warm within that space. Once a person has been horribly burned, it's too late.]*
7. Why should you not use a heater as a cooking appliance?
8. If you use a heater in a tent, what is a particular danger you must guard against?
9. Does it matter where you set a heater or on what surface? Why? What are some problems you may encounter?
10. Does it matter how you mount a heater? How should you mount it?

Participant's Signature and Date

[illegible]