

Toolbox Talks 2

091: Unsafe Conditions: 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:

This Safety Talk addresses unsafe conditions with heating devices.

Discussion notes:

Heater clearances

Any violation of heater clearance is an unsafe condition. The violations aren't limited to combustibles. They also apply to incombustibles, because the heater is designed to operate with a certain amount of free air space around it. The clearances apply, regardless of the type of heater being used.

Unsafe conditions involving heaters

- Ventilated fuel-burning heater has less than 18 inches of space around the chimney connector. Move items away from the heater.
- Insufficient space in front. The required space varies with the model of heater, but generally, 10 feet is the minimum. It could be considerably more, depending on the heater size and output.
- Circulating heater has less than one foot of space any side or to the rear. Move items away from the heater.
- Radiant heater has less than three feet of space on any side or to the rear. Move items away from the heater.
- Portable cords run in front of heater grills or vents. Protect the jackets of these cords ensuring they aren't routed directly in the path of the heater.
- Food cooking or warming on top of a portable heater. The heater isn't listed for this kind of use. Notify your foreman for corrective action.
- Gloves, socks, or tools sitting on a heater. The heater isn't listed for this kind of use. Notify your foreman for corrective action.
- Heater is sitting on wrong type of 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.
- Vents closed or obstructed. Open them up, or shut the heater off.
- Heater mounted or placed in any manner not expressly allowed by the manufacturer's markings or instructions. Mount or place the heater properly. If it's not your heater, contact your foreman for corrective action.
- Heater used in a temporary structure made of canvas, tarpaulins, or other soft materials. This condition is dangerous if these movable panels aren't secured against wind.

Review and discussion

1. When is a violation of heater clearance space an unsafe condition?
2. Do clearance rules apply to stationary heaters or just to portables?
3. Is it true that electric heaters don't have clearances to observe?
4. How much space do you need around the typical portable heater?

6. Why is this statement false? “To keep portable cords from freezing up, you should run them in front of the heater.” *[Note to Presenter: Obviously, cords don’t freeze up. So, there’s no reason to run cords in front of a heater. Doing so can lead to insulation failure and is unsafe.]*

8. Is it safe to mount a heater any way you want? What about just turning it on its side?

10. If a heater is being used in a tent, what safety practice must be observed? *[Note to Presenter: Trailers are used much more than tents on construction sites, so many people aren't aware of the safety issues with tents. You may encounter a tent or canvas structure being used for short-term storage. Such a space may be heated, usually to lower the moisture. A more common arrangement is an open shelter with a canvas wall on the north-facing side. Sometimes, that wall is made of a thick plastic. In any case, wind can blow the material too close to the heater, if the panel is not properly secured.]*

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