

Use of Portable Space Heaters

Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania acknowledges that individuals have varying levels of comfort with temperature. In accordance with PRP 5451 – Energy Conservation & Sustainability Policy, the use of space heaters in college facilities is prohibited, except in emergency situations or when the HVAC system is not functioning according to our heating and cooling standards. Space heaters may only be used if an exception is granted, and the specific equipment has been reviewed and approved by the Facilities Department.

Regardless of whether they are purchased by the university or are personal property, two key concerns regarding space heater usage in campus buildings are fire safety and energy efficiency. All space heaters used on campus must be approved for fire safety by the National Fire Protection Association. Liquid-fueled space heaters (e.g., kerosene heaters) are strictly prohibited in residential, office, classroom, or research buildings. The presence of an electric space heater poses a fire hazard and significant risk if left unattended or placed too close to flammable materials. All space heaters must meet the following four criteria:

1. Be Underwriters Laboratories (UL) approved.
2. Have heating elements that are shielded from contact.
3. Be tilt-proof (automatically shut off when tipped over).
4. Be thermostat-controlled.

Energy efficiency is also a critical consideration, as electric space heaters can be an expensive heating option. If a member of the campus community feels that a space heater is necessary for comfort, it may indicate that the central heating system requires repair. The Facilities Department should be consulted, by placing a workorder on the system or calling the workorder desk at 570-389-4586, if the central heating system cannot meet comfort needs. Whenever possible, Energy Star appliances will be utilized, and new technologies will be adopted as they become available.

Using space heaters can disrupt the normal operation of building HVAC systems, leading to uncomfortable conditions for occupants in both the heater's vicinity and adjacent areas. For instance, a space heater in a room with a thermostat may cause the building's temperature control system to increase the flow of cool air to lower the thermostat's temperature. The individual using the heater will experience warmth from it, but others in the same zone will only feel cool air. Consequently, a space heater can lower the temperature for others in the zone. State regulations mandate that the university adhere to ASHRAE Standard 90 and 100 which prohibits simultaneous heating and cooling in the same space solely for comfort purposes.