

## **WEEKLY SAFETY TIP – 12/12/11 – SAFE USE of SPACE HEATERS**

It's cold out there! Winter has set in around the country, even though the first official day of winter is not until next week. Colder temperatures outside sometimes lead to colder temperatures inside. For a variety of reasons, HVAC systems and furnaces don't always do the job to keep us warm or are slow to start in the mornings. In our attempts to maintain a warm place to work (and live) we often turn to space heaters – both at our jobs and sometimes at home.

Unfortunately, a year ago, a space heater was reported to have contributed to a fire that took the lives of 5 children. You can read a little about it through this link to the space heater safety page from the Consumer Product Safety Commission: <http://www.cpsc.gov/onsafety/2010/11/space-heater-safety/>.

Like many pieces of equipment, there are safe ways to use a space heater, and some not so safe. To help your winter season stay safe and warm, here are some tips for wherever you choose to use a space heater.

1. Not all space heaters are created equal. Check the heater – there should be some form of certification stamp or information on the heater or the packaging that indicates the make and model have been approved by a national testing laboratory – preferably Underwriters Laboratory (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM). This will tell you that it is a better quality piece of equipment.
2. Look for a space heater that has “tip over protection.” Many space heaters (and irons) will turn themselves off if tipped over, which lessens the chance of a fire.
3. If you are pulling the space heater out of storage for the winter season, look it over and clean it up before using. Make sure the wiring is in good condition. And clean away dust that could catch fire before it heats up.
4. **NO EXTENSION CORDS!** This is both a regulatory no-no, and a fire hazard. Plug the space heater into an approved electrical receptacle with appropriate grounding.
5. Place your space heater so that all combustible items (paper, carpeting, storage boxes, etc) are at least three feet away. Did you see the word carpeting there? Space heaters are best placed on non-combustible surfaces, like cement or tile floors.
6. Turn it off. Never leave a space heater on overnight. Consider putting it on a timer that will ensure it is turned off before you leave at the end of your work day/shift. That way, if you get distracted while walking out the door, you don't have to worry about whether it is turned off or not.
7. A space heater's best friend is an alert co-worker. Keep an eye on it to make sure no fires have a chance of starting. And enlist the help of a carbon monoxide monitor, particularly if you have a generator operating to run the space heater!

Next week we will send out our Quarterly Safety Newsletter. It is already jam packed with safety information, the next installment on Paul and Ron's Psychology of Disasters, and Paul's assessments of the “What's Wrong in This Picture.” Until then – stay warm, and stay safe.