Inappropriate use of space heaters poses fire, burn dangers

Heating equipment is a significant cause of fires in both homes and healthcare facilities, and half of those fires occur in the months of December, January and February, according to the National Fire Protection Association (Source: NFPA).

The NFPA says that heating equipment is responsible for about 50,000 fires each year, about 14 percent of all reported home fires. (Source: NFPA) From 2006 to 2010, heating equipment was also involved in six percent of reported healthcare facility fires, according to the association. One of the most common causes in both settings is portable space heaters. (Sources: NFPA, WOWK 13 Charleston)

Space heaters can quickly heat small spaces and provide a cost-effective supplementary heating source when used correctly. But they can also be dangerous because many produce radiant heat, directly heating objects and people in their line of sight. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), about 300 people die in space heater-related fires annually. Another 6,000 visit emergency departments each year for burn injuries associated with the surface of space heaters and other room heaters. (Sources: Energy.gov, WKYT Lexington)

Firefighters say most space heater-related fires can be attributed to negligence, maintenance issues, or a lack of understanding of the heater's purpose and use. Like many other types of electrical fires, these can easily be prevented with basic safety measures like keeping combustible objects a safe distance away. (Sources: WKYT Lexington, WDBJ 7 Roanoke, Energy.gov)
Review your facility's policies regarding the use of space heaters in the workplace and communicate the appropriate protocols and safety warnings to all staff. View the Louisiana State University Health Science Center's policy as an example.

Review clinical procedures for burn care.

If you use space heaters in your home, follow CPSC safety tips and encourage others to do the same. Use only those heaters that have been certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, keep them at least three feet away from any combustible material, do not use them with extension cords, and turn them off and unplug them when you leave your home and when you sleep. (Source: Massachusetts Office of Public Safety and Security)

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEDNESDAY

14 No Mass Gatherings Scheduled

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