

# Plugged IN

Fourth Quarter 2010



## Space Heaters

Space heaters can be an attractive way to heat up a room or area when the weather is cold. However, space heaters can be dangerous if used incorrectly. According to Harvard University Environmental Health & Safety group, more than 25,000 residential fires and 6,000 emergency room visits are caused by space heaters in the U.S. every year.

Approximately one-third of all house fires nationwide occur during the cold home-heating season of December, January and February. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the major cause of these winter fires can be attributed to faulty or improper use and maintenance of supplemental heating equipment, such as space heaters.

As part of its Teach Learn Care TLC campaign, Safe Electricity urges everyone in the home to understand the importance of using space heaters safely.

“Portable heaters must be used with caution, keeping safety a priority,” says Mike Ashenfelter, electrical inspector and member of the Safe Electricity Advisory Board. “Stay warm and safe, and give space heaters space – at least three feet from anything that can burn – including little fingers!”

Some cities have banned the use of many types of portable space heaters. Before purchasing or using any type of space heater, check with your local fire department to find out if it is legal in your community.

Safe Electricity offers the following precautions when using electric space heaters:

Purchase only space heaters that have been safety tested and UL approved. Make sure the unit is equipped with an emergency tip-over shut-off feature and heating element guards. Read and follow all of the manufacturers instructions for operation and care.

Before using a space heater, make sure your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are in good working condition.

Check to make sure the heater is clean and in good condition, and have all problems professionally repaired.

Place heater out of high-traffic areas and on a level, hard, non-flammable floor surface – NOT on carpets, furniture or countertops.

Space heaters have one purpose – to provide supplemental heating. Never use them to thaw pipes, cook food, or dry clothing or towels.

Remember to keep space heaters at least three feet from all combustible liquids like fuel, spray cans and paint, as well as flammable items such as draperies, blankets and sofas.

Never allow pets or children near an electric heater. Accidental contact could result in serious shock or burns.

Do not overload circuits. Never use extension cords or multiple plugs with a space heater, and make sure the unit is not plugged into the same circuit as other electric appliances.

If your space heater is plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) and the GFCI trips, don't assume there is something wrong with the GFCI. Immediately stop using the heater until it can be checked by a professional – if not, a serious shock could occur.

Never leave space heaters unattended. Turn off your space heater and unplug it before leaving the room or going to bed.

“Consider replacing older space heaters with newer, safer models,” suggests Ashenfelter. “Additionally, look for features that enhance the safety of the unit including an electronic thermostat which allows precise temperature control to avoid overheating.”

Many people also use electric blankets to keep warm during cold winter nights. Before plugging in electric blankets, check for any damage and inspect cords for frays, cracks or cuts. Electric blankets should not be tucked under the mattress and nothing should be placed on top of the blanket while it's in use, including comforters and bedspreads. Never dry clean an electric blanket; the chemicals can damage the heating insulation and increase the risk of fire. And pets should never be allowed to sleep on the electric blanket.

“In addition to these safety tips, remember that a functioning smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire,” reminds Ashenfelter. “Replace the batteries twice a year, and remember to practice a home escape plan and share these safety tips with your family.”





## Keep Holidays Bright and Safe

Those beautiful Christmas trees, holiday lights, and festive



ornaments take a significant toll each year by contributing to fires, electrical burns, and even death. The holiday season will record an average of 400 fatalities and 130,000 fires that are attributed to electrical decoration mishaps.

To keep your family safe, use this safety checklist:

- Carefully inspect each electrical decoration. Cracked or frayed sockets, loose or bare wires, and loose connections may cause a serious shock or start a fire.
- Always unplug electrical decorations before replacing bulbs or fuses.
- When hanging decorations, do not connect more than three light strings together.
- Never attach electrical decorations with nails or staples. Use plastic hooks.
- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to prevent electric shock.

For more tips on decorating safely for the holidays, visit <http://www.safeelectricity.org/>.

## Safe Electricity Urges Caution around Electric Meters and Equipment



Electric meters, poles, and lines play important roles in keeping electric systems running smoothly, but they are often overlooked

and even abused. Safe Electricity urges everyone to stay away from and be respectful of utility equipment in order to keep electrical systems running safely and reliably.

Don't tamper with your electric meter for any reason. Tampering with your meter is illegal in Kentucky, but more importantly, can cause electrocution and fire, resulting in injury and damage, even death. If you think there may be a problem with your meter, call your local electric provider – don't try to fix it yourself.

Exercise caution with and around electrical equipment to protect yourself and others:

- Never try to prune trees that appear to be growing into power lines. Contact your electric provider. Utilities have skilled professionals trained to safely prune and trim trees for electric line clearances.
- Don't post fliers or posters on electric poles. Damage to the poles can create a dangerous situation for those around them and can cause outages affecting many more. Posters, nails, and staples can make it dangerous or impossible for linemen to climb the poles if needed and protruding nails are a danger for anyone who needs to remove the poles.
- When landscaping, plant tall-growing trees safely away from power lines; seek help in choosing

and planting trees and bushes that won't grow to interfere with electrical equipment.

- Do not plant near underground utility services. Tree roots can grow and interfere with underground wire, pipes and cables. Future repairs to these facilities also could damage the health and beauty of nearby plants and trees.

- Keep areas around electric meters, transformers or other electrical equipment free of any vegetation that could limit utility service access.

- Call Jackson Purchase Energy at least 48 hours (excluding weekends & holidays) prior to digging and ask us to locate and mark underground lines.

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