



# Curatorial Safety

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## Space Heater Safety

Like many homeowners and businesses, park staff sometimes use electric space heaters to provide supplemental heat for offices, visitor centers, and maintenance buildings. The improper use of space heaters is the leading cause of wintertime home fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association. If your park utilizes electric space heaters, be sure that they are in good condition and used according to the manufacturer's operating and safety instructions. (Due to the possible hazards of fires and explosions of flammable fuels, carbon monoxide poisoning, and indoor air pollution from improper venting, the use of gas and kerosene space heaters should be avoided.)

On some occasions, curatorial staff may feel the need to utilize electric space heaters when working on cataloging or preservation projects within unheated outbuildings or to provide additional heating in offices and work areas. **Although electric space heaters have sometimes been employed within historic structures during winter daytime hours to provide for the comfort of visitors and staff, for safety's sake, such use should probably be avoided.**

The following safety guidelines related to space heater use are from the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Never place a space heater on carpet. Space heaters should only be placed on a non-combustible surface.
  - Keep clothing, furniture, draperies, carpeting, and other items at least three feet away from the space heater.
  - Have a multipurpose (ABC) dry chemical fire extinguisher nearby.
  - Use only electric heaters equipped with a thermostat or an automatic shut-off switch.
  - Never leave any space heater unattended (turn off and unplug the heater whenever you leave the area).
  - Ensure that the area is equipped with working smoke detectors.
  - The heater should be listed by Underwriter's Laboratories (UL-listed). It should be equipped with a switch that automatically shuts the heater off if it tips over, and a cut-off device in case of overheating.
  - Do not use space heaters in bathrooms, and do not touch a space heater if you are wet.
  - Never try to repair the heater yourself, call a certified service technician.
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- Purchase a heater with a guard around the heating element.
- Before using the heater, read and follow the instructions for its operation and maintenance.
- Never run the heater's cord (or any cord) under rugs or carpeting, as this can cause a fire.
- Do not use an electric heater as a dryer by placing clothing over it and never use the heater to thaw pipes.
- Keep the heater in safe working condition. Replace missing guards and controls at once. Never operate a defective heater.
- Do not place the heater where children might play near it or where people might trip over or bump into it.
- Place the heater on a level surface for stability.

For further space heater safety information, consult these documents from the Consumer Product Safety Commission:

*Electric Space Heaters Fact Sheet.* CPSC Document #098. Available on the web at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/098.html>.

*What You Should Know About Space Heaters.* CPSC Document #463. Available on the web at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/463.html>.

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