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Safety and Risk Services

DATE: December 12, 2006

TO: As needed

FROM: Vincent J. Leonard, Fire University Fire Marshal, SRS

SUBJECT: Safe Use of Space Heaters Guidelines

cc: All building occupants as needed

Please use the following guideline when using authorized space heaters.

The common cause of fires associated with space heaters include: unattended heaters, heaters not being properly maintained, use of extension cords with heaters and heaters being too close to combustibles. The following are required safe use guidelines for the use of portable heaters at UNM.

a. Authorized Use

- Portable space heaters are normally authorized only when there is a malfunction with the building heating system. This is normally determined by the Physical Plant Department (PPD).
- Should building occupants feel they need additional heat in their area even though the heating system is operational, they should contact PPD to ensure the building electrical system will not be affected by the additional power usage. Discretion should be exercised in minimizing the use of space heaters as they present a significant fire hazard if not used properly.
- The office or department requesting the use of heaters should contact PPD for written clarification that the heating system is or will be inoperative for a specified period of time, and/or that the use of heaters will not cause problems with the building electrical systems.
- The letter must be made available to SRS upon request. Note - it is not necessary to submit the letter to SRS prior to using heaters but have it available if requested by SRS inspectors.
- SRS should be contacted (via phone, email or fax) that heaters will be in use. This guideline will be made available if not already provided to the user by UNM Procurement.
- The user must ensure that all space heaters used under their control meet the requirements as noted in this guideline.

b. Type of Heater - If authorized for use, the following guidelines must be followed:

- The heater must be UL or FM listed, incorporate a tip over switch, which will turn the heating element and fan off if the unit is knocked over. Note- current design of space heaters (i.e. round and tower styles) may tip over to the side but the heating element shut off may not activate in this position. Space heaters must shut off regardless of the direction they tip over.

- The heater must be in good repair with a cord long enough to reach the electrical outlet. **EXTENSION CORDS MUST NOT BE USED ON HEATERS.** This includes using bar outlets.
- The heater must be unplugged at the end of the workday or if the building will be left unattended for an extended period.

c. Use of Heaters

- The heater must be kept three (3) feet from any combustible materials. If heaters are used under desks where combustibles such as trash cans are also commonly placed, either the heater or the trash can must be relocated.
- Heaters may not be used under wooden desks or other wooden furnishings.
- The heater must not be used within 50 feet of flammable storage.
- The placement of the heater will not create a tripping or evacuation hazard.
- Fire/smoke rated doors must not be blocked open in order to better distribute heat. Exceptions must be requested through PPD and SRS. PPD will determine if the heat distribution system would be affected. SRS will determine if additional safety requirements may be needed.

Please feel free to call for assistance with fire safety matters at 277-4076