



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

To: All Local Housing Authority Executive Directors, Property Managers and Maintenance Staff.

From: Facility Management Specialist (FMS) Unit

Date: November 16, 2022

Subject: The Dangers of Portable Heaters in Public Housing

The DHCD Facilities Management team recommends that LHAs have a policy prohibiting the use of portable space heaters in your developments.

Space heaters are found to be a top cause of building fires and pose a serious risk to LHA residents and property.

While these heaters can provide warmth, they also bring a considerable safety risk--- both to the residents and the housing authority property. While each LHA should adopt a policy tailored to its needs, DHCD recommends the policy discourage or prohibit the use of portable space heaters. Like no smoking policies, the implementation of a space heater policy will also help the LHA's efforts to maintain fire protection insurance for its property.

If the LHA chooses to allow space heaters, the LHA should narrowly define the types of heaters that would be permitted (i.e. oil filled portable radiators vs. ceramic heaters). When considering a policy for your LHA, please be aware, there are many types of portable heaters and each one has many safety precautions---- some of which pose a higher or lower risk of fire with their use.

Example of one manufacturer's precautions:

Do not use when sleeping or unattended.
Heaters should not be left on during the night in any situation.
Unplug when not in use.
Do not use with power strips or extension cords.
Do not use on the same circuit with other appliances.
Do not use in bathrooms or other damp areas.
Do not use around unattended children.
Do not use as your primary source of heat.

Best efforts should be made to effectively communicate to residents the necessity and importance of reporting heating issues to LHA maintenance. The use of portable heaters can prevent the heating system from functioning as intended.

In certain circumstances, if the thermostat does not call for heat to circulate to the rest of the unit, the pipes could freeze and the system will not provide heat to the unit or other resident units. Simply put, portable space heaters have the potential to mask problems with the heating system and put the whole property at risk.

Encouraging LHA residents to bring forth heating issues or concerns serves several benefits: 1) identifying areas in needs of service, 2) supporting efficient and environmentally responsible heating; and 3) offsetting the inclination your LHA residents may have to rely on space heaters for supplemental heat will help the housing authority verify that the heating system is operating correctly, and that the LHA remains in compliance with the State Sanitary Code.

Under the State Sanitary Code, the building heating system should be adequate to provide heat to the occupants according to 105 CMR 410.200/201. The owner shall provide heat in every habitable room and every room containing a toilet, shower, or bathtub to at least 68°F (20° C) between 7:00 A.M. and 11:00 P.M. and at least 64°F (17° C) between 11:01 P.M. and 6:59 A.M. every day other than during the period from June 15th to September 15th, both inclusive.

When the LHA makes a decision to allow portable space heaters because of insufficient heat to a unit, it should be considered a temporary measure, determined on a case-by-case basis, with written authorization from the LHA--only when it has been determined by the LHA that existing building heat sources are temporarily inadequate.

In the event space heaters are temporarily permitted, the LHA is encouraged to provide residents with safety use guidelines such as this document from the National Fire Protection Association: Safety Use Guidelines for Space Heaters

To summarize, behind cooking, heating is the second cause of home fires, with half of heating fires being caused by electrical space heaters. For this reason, your LHA should strongly consider adopting a policy prohibiting the use of portable space heaters in your developments. This type of policy can ultimately help protect tenant safety and the LHA property.

Please contact your assigned Facilities Management Specialist if you have further questions or concerns.

Robert G. Garrett, Facilities Management Supervisor
Department of Housing and Community Development
Cell: 508-861-5509
Office: 617-573-1230