

RISK INSIGHTS

OUTDOOR HEATER SAFETY: PATIO HEATERS



With the onset of colder weather and people congregating outside as they continue to socialize the use of propane patio heaters is increasing. These are being placed in **outdoor dining facilities at restaurants, outdoor exercise facilities (under tents and pavilions) and even around picnic tables.**

Heaters, specifically radiant type heaters are commonly used as patio heaters. They are typically un-vented and self-contained portable units. The fuel source can either be liquified petroleum gas (LPG) or electric. The heat radiating from these units can be extremely intense and commonly requires an 8-foot clearance.

They “take the chill” out of the surroundings. However, they also potentially pose a safety hazard from the use of the device to the storage of the propane. An accident can happen suddenly so there are a few things you should do to reduce the likelihood of an accident.

THERE ARE TWO KEY COMPONENTS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED: THE STORAGE OF THE PROPANE CYLINDERS AND THE USAGE OF THE PROPANE HEATERS. LET’S EXAMINE BOTH COMPONENTS.

Propane Cylinder/heater Storage

- Do not store spare cylinders inside a building. This includes the maintenance rooms and mechanical equipment rooms.
- Cylinders must be stored in a location that reduces the potential for damage and exposure to heat and secured to prevent from being flipped over
- Cylinders need to be at least 5 feet away from any door opening in a building that is frequented by the public
- Store the heaters in accordance with manufactures guidelines.

Propane Cylinder/heater Usage

- All propane heaters should be used in accordance with the listing and manufacturer instructions. Only units ‘listed’ or ‘approved’ by a recognized testing organization such as UL/ULC, CSA, or FM should be used.

Various heaters may look the same and some may appear easy to set up, but the person assembling or using the propane heaters should read the instructions.

- Propane heaters should be used in areas where the heater is on level ground and there is little change of tipping over. Secure if possible as these units are top heavy and can topple in wind.
- Do not use in enclosed spaces as proper ventilation is required to reduce the chance of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from the heating element, including plants.
- All portable heaters should be turned off when the area is not occupied.
- Maintain the heaters and propane tanks with proper inspections, cleaning and maintenance.
- If using the element outside in a tented area or pavilion place the heaters in a manner that they do not obstruct walking areas or create a trip and fall hazard.
- Ensure that there are serviced fire extinguishers available and accessible
- A written operating procedure should be established based on the manufacturers’ instructions and heaters should be installed and operated according to the manufacturers’ instructions.

Outdoor heating devices serve a purpose and if used properly, maintained and stored will be less likely to have the potential to cause harm to an individual or property. Visit the [Outdoor Heating Fact Sheet](#) to learn more.

For more information on making your business safer, contact our Risk Services team at [1.833.692.4111](tel:1.833.692.4111) or visit us at www.nbins.com.