

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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## “10 Safety Tips for Using a Space Heater”

Space heaters have been responsible for at least four fires in Nebraska in the last two weeks.

An Omaha home burned to the ground December 11 with a space heater sited as the cause. On December 16, a space heater sitting too close to a bag of clothes caused a fire that killed an occupant of a home in Beatrice. Two children died in an Omaha house fire December 18 and fire officials determined the use of space heaters as the cause. A space heater is blamed for a fire that significantly damaged Tony's Steakhouse near Stanton December 22.



According to the National Fire Protection Association, approximately one third of all house fires occur during the cold weather months with the majority of those fires caused by space heaters.

So should a person still use space heaters in their home and/or business? City of Norfolk Fire Marshal Terry Zwiebel said that it's okay to use space heaters as long as they are in good working order and are used properly.

“Purchase only the space heaters that have been safety tested an accredited testing lab such as UL (Underwriters Laboratory). Make sure the heater is equipped with an emergency tip over shut off feature and heat element guards.

Read and follow all of the manufacturers' instructions that come with the heater,” Zwiebel said.

Other tips for operating a space heater:

1. Make sure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are in good working condition.
2. The space heater should be clean and in good condition.
3. Place heater out of high traffic areas and should be on a hard, non-flammable floor surface. Check manufacturer's specification for surfaces the unit may be set on.
4. Keep combustible items such as clothing, boxes, furniture, blankets or draperies at least three feet away from the space heater.
5. Never use extension cords with a space heater. In order to prevent circuit overload, make sure the space heater is not plugged into the same circuit as other electrical appliances. Space heaters with frayed or damaged cords or plug-ins should be discarded.
6. Never leave space heaters unattended. Unplug them if leaving the room or going to bed.
7. Propane or kerosene heaters should only be used in areas where the air is well circulated such as a screen-in porch and have oxygen depletion sensors that will shut down the unit.
8. Purchase space heaters that stay cool to the touch and that include a fan to circulate the heat.
9. Make sure the heater has a shut off feature that automatically turns the unit off if it overheats or tips over.

10. Don't use a space heater in a bathroom and never use it to dry clothes or shoes.

“Space heaters are convenient and safe when used properly. Sealing window and door crevices goes a long way towards warming a home and may prevent you from the added cost and risk of using a space heater,” Zwiebel said.

For more information about the use of space heaters, call the City of Norfolk Prevention Division at 844-2060.