

Fact Sheet

Heaters and Fireplaces

What are heaters?

There are a number of heating appliances available in the market today that provide warmth in the home. These devices include electric, oil-filled, gas and although not commonly used today, kerosene heaters. Fireplaces and potbelly stoves are also used to produce heat. Some of these devices operate with open flames while others generate heat that can be controlled or regulated.

How may a child be injured?

Burns:

- Children may sustain burn injuries when coming into contact with a heating appliance or gaining access to flames.
- A child can receive a flame burn if the heater comes into contact with flammable items such as night clothes, curtains, paper, carpet etc.

Slips and trips:

- A child may trip if heaters are positioned in traffic areas in the home or where cords are placed inappropriately.

Electrocutions:

- A child may receive an electrical shock or be electrocuted if allowed to come into contact with heating appliances.

How common are these injuries

Winter is the most dangerous time for fires in the home, with around 30 per cent of the year's fires occurring between 1 June and 31 August. Many of the 1328 residential fires (in NSW), which occurred in winter 2006, could have been avoided. Common causes of fire at this time of the year include faulty electric blankets and heaters, accidents involving heaters and open fires, lint left in clothes dryer filters, cooking left unattended, and faults caused by overloading power supplies. ¹

As many as 300 Australian children each year are admitted to hospital after being burned when nightclothes catch fire. Between July 2005 and June 2007, 57 children under the age of 17 years, received hospital or ambulatory care in NSW, after sustaining burns from heaters.²

Is there a Law or Australian Standard for Heaters?

All electric room heaters sold in Australia must be manufactured to Australian Standards. There are numerous Australian Standards for heating appliances. It is recommended that when purchasing heating appliances, look for one which complies with the following Australian Standards :

- AS/NZS 3350.2.30:1997 (Amdt 2:2001) – Room Heaters
- AS/NZS 60335.2.102:2004 – Solid fuel burning appliances
- AS 1853:1983 – Automated oil and gas burners
- DR 05132 – LP gas portable and mobile appliances
- DR 05412 – Gas space heating appliances
- AS 4558-2000 (AG 108-2000) – Decorative gas log and other fuel effect
- AS/NZS 2286:2001 - space heaters guard for use with domestic comfort heating appliances.





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The law, in New South Wales, states that all electrical goods sold must meet the requirements of the Electricity (Consumer Safety) Act 2004 and its Regulations. This legislation covers the distribution of safe electrical appliances and other electrical goods which must be tested and approved before they can be sold.³ The easiest way to determine if an electrical good is approved is to see if it displays an acceptable approval mark, as shown below:

Type of approval mark	Example
State approval numbers	
New South Wales	N12345 or NSW12345
Queensland	Q011234
Victoria	V023425
South Australia	S12345
ACT	A12345
Standards Australia International (SAI) type mark	SAI TE (licence no.)
SAI Global	
Regulatory Compliance Mark (RCM). Note: may be accompanied by the supplier code (eg. N789)	

Remember:

- The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommend that you purchase a heater that meets one of the above mentioned Standards.
- Purchase a heater that has a guard around the heating element. A wire grill or other protection is essential to prevent fingers or materials touching the element when it is hot.
- Store the heater in a stable position by placing it only on a level floor surface - never place heaters on elevated surfaces such as cabinets, tables etc.
- Locate the heater so it will not be knocked over or block your exit in case of fire. The heater should be placed away from traffic areas such as doorways and hallways and should be placed at least one metre away from anything that might catch fire such as clothing, furniture, curtains, etc.
- Do not dry clothing items by placing them over an electric heater.
- Avoid using extension cords unless absolutely necessary and do not overload power points. If you must use an extension cord with an electric heater, make sure it is marked with a power rating at least as high as that of the heater itself. Ensure that objects are not placed on top of cords or extension leads. **NB:** Cords should always be kept stretched out and not be run under mats as they can become damaged through wear and tear.
- Switch off heating appliances when leaving the house or when sleeping.
- To prevent electrocution, electric heaters must be kept away from water. Never touch an electric heater if you are wet.
- Always keep a heater in safe working condition and replace missing controls. Never operate a heater that is damaged.
- Ensure you install and maintain at least one smoke detector on each floor of your home.

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Open flame heating

Open fires and pot-bellied stoves should have a guard around them when in use. Guards should be:

- at least 700mm high
- made of heat-resistant or low-conducting metal
- able to be secured to the walls or the floor

If the openings in the mesh of the guard are 20mm or smaller, the guard should be placed at least 150mm away from the hot surface. If the openings are larger, the guard should be 500mm away from the hot surface so that your child cannot touch it.

- Do not use wood burning stoves and fireplaces unless they are properly installed and meet building codes.
- The stove must sit on a non-combustible or code-specified protector. It should extend 450mm beyond the stove on all sides. This will reduce the possibility of the floor being ignited.
- The chimney and fluepipe should be checked frequently during winter for creosote build-up and cleaned when necessary. Creosote builds up in chimney flues and can cause a chimney fire. To reduce creosote build-up, avoid smouldering fires.
- Never burn household rubbish in a stove as this could overheat the stove.
- Never use petrol or other flammable liquids to start wood stove fires. Petrol will ignite and explode. Fire starters are the safest, most controlled way, to start a fire.
- Never use a vacuum cleaner to clean out a fireplace as hot ash can start a fire and the fine ash will clog the filter system. When cleaning, use a metal container with a tight lid for ash removal. Dispose of cold ash in the garbage or the garden – ensuring it contains no smouldering embers.

Kerosene heaters

- Operate your heater in a room with a door open to the rest of the house.
- If you must operate the heater in a room with the door closed to the rest of the house, leave an outside window opened approximately an inch (2.5 cm) to ensure adequate fresh air infiltration.
- Always operate your heater according to the manufacturer's instructions, making sure that the wick is set at the proper level as instructed by the manufacturer.
- Keep the wick in the heater clean and in good operating condition by following the cleaning and maintenance procedures recommended by the manufacturer.

¹ NSW Fire Brigades <http://www.nswfb.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=627>

² NSW Severe Burns Injury Service, 2007

³ <http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/corporate/publications/fte26safeelectricalgoods.html>

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www.chw.edu.au/parents/kidshealth

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