Portable heaters

Introduction

Heating systems in University buildings will generally be sufficient for the thermal comfort of all occupants.

Where portable heaters are required, the following are mandatory:

- Estates must agree to their introduction (contact Helpdesk in the first instance – ext. 3209 or EstatesHelpdesk@kent.ac.uk)
- The appropriate type must be chosen and care must be taken regarding fire and general safety (see below).

Reasons for avoiding use of portable heaters include

- Increased fire risk
- Additional energy consumption, cost and CO₂ emissions
- Problematic effects on local heating controls (additional heating used in one particular room can cause other rooms nearby to be cold)
- Other life cycle costs (purchase, testing, disposal).

Types of portable heater

Oil-filled radiators are strongly recommended as the safest type. These can be supplied by Estates.

Where there are existing Convector heaters, these are tolerable with care, but are not recommended. No new convector heaters should be purchased. If replacing an old one, an oil filled radiator should be provided.

This type of heater needs generous clear space above and around it to work effectively, is easily damaged leading to increased risks, and can cause fires if air grilles are blocked (e.g. by materials draped over the appliance) or if dust or debris accumulates inside. Good standards of housekeeping and vigilance are therefore essential.
Personal Fan heaters are prohibited. If it is necessary to replace an old one, an oil filled radiator should be provided.

This type of heater is prone to similar problems as convector heaters (see above) but at higher levels of risk due to the greater proximity of heating elements to the surfaces, and the intense directional heat produced.

Halogen and open bar heaters are prohibited.

With these types of heater there is a high risk of setting fire to items in front of the heater, especially within 1 metre of the elements.

Gas, oil, paraffin etc. heaters are prohibited.

**Guidance for use of portable heaters in University premises**

Follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

Always keep heaters clear of furniture, curtains, fabrics, stationery and other combustible materials. Never place heaters under furniture, including desks.

As with all electrical equipment, keep an eye on the heater and stop using it immediately if there is any damage to the plug, cable or casing, any charring, yellowing or other discolouration or damage of any part, any unusual hot or acrid smell, or any other sign of incorrect operation. Newly purchased electrical equipment does not need immediate Portable Appliance Testing if bought from a reputable supplier and appropriately CE marked, but will need adding to the PAT register in future.

Never allow electrical leads to trail across floors unless protected from both damage and trip hazard by a proprietary cable guard channel.
Heaters should never be plugged into extension leads unless it is verified that the total load on the extension does not exceed 13 Amps. In practice, this is difficult to ensure on an ongoing basis since other appliances plugged in are likely to change over a period of time, so the use of extension leads with heaters is strongly discouraged. Cube-type multi-socket adaptors are prohibited for all purposes.

Plug-in time switch controllers must never be used with heaters. Heaters with inbuilt time-switches can, on request, be supplied and set up by Estates to operate in automatic mode. Otherwise, electric heaters must always be switched off overnight, and only switched on manually by the person occupying the room at the time.

General guidance on electrical safety is available here:

http://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/electricity/electricity.html