Construction site fire safety: 6 tips for external heat sources.



The cold winter months tend to bring an influx of construction site liability claims linked to fires. Can you guess the culprit? Read on.

If you work outdoors or in a warehouse through the blustery winter months, you know how essential it is to keep your team warm. That's why you may have external heat sources on-site, like electric or gas heaters. While the heaters aren't inherently dangerous when operated properly, they can spark flames, cause injuries, and lead to property loss if they're not maintained or used according to safety instructions.

We're here to help you prevent loss and keep your team safe. Follow our construction site fire safety tips to use external heating units safely this season.

1. **Choose the right external heater for the job.** Depending on the size of your space and the nature of your work, the safest heating unit can vary. If possible, a permanent heating system is typically the safest option. If permanent heating is not possible, consider the pros and cons of indirect, direct, and electric heat sources.

2. **Check the safety standards.** All external heat sources should be approved and operated according to the manufacturer's instructions. Keep any manuals and documentation on hand and follow all safety protocol as it's written.

3. **Establish safe surfaces and surroundings.** External heat sources should be set up on flat, dry, non-combustible surfaces only. If you're using an electric heater, use ground fault protection. Maintain a perimeter of at least four feet (or as directed by the unit's manual) between the heat source and any structures or equipment. Ensure the heat source is properly secured so it doesn't move or tip over while running.

4. **Monitor external heat sources regularly.** Getting the heat source inspected by a professional can help reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and fire. Check the ventilation often. Repair or replace damaged parts before they malfunction or spark flames.

5. **Shut down heat sources.** Before leaving for the evening, establish safety protocol to ensure the heating unit is properly turned off. Choose a point person whose job is to turn off the unit and consider adding a second individual to check the unit each night. In addition, create a clocking-out checklist that includes shutting down the heat source and signing off on the task when it is complete.

6. **Train your team.** Every team member should be well versed in operating and turning off heat sources. Include this instruction in onboarding for new team members and conduct periodic refresher courses. Equip team members with personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce the risk of injury from fires. Also, be sure they know where the fire extinguishers are on the construction site.

Construction site fire safety is just the beginning. When you're using an external space heater at home, safe habits are just as essential. See what you can do to protect your family. Then, talk to a local, independent agent to get all the coverage you need.