

Power Strip Safety

Written by Willie Henning,
DMI EH&S Consultant

Here we are, December 2025! The end of the year can bring several activities to our lives both at work and at home. The holidays, end of year tasks along with preparing for the new year, and cold weather all add up to seasonal changes. I would like to pass along a reminder regarding space heaters and power strips. As the decorations are hung and cold weather sets in, electrical outlets are in short demand. However, remember that power strips are not the answer in all applications especially when using space heaters. Two points to remember, the college should include space heaters and power strips in the fire prevention plan so the expectations are clear, and employees should be aware of the requirements and consequences regarding power strips and space heaters. I came across the following article in an NFPA newsletter that sums up these points rather well. Also, these tips apply at home as well so as we head into the last month of the year let's all look out for our coworkers and our families. Happy Holidays!

Firefighters want everyone to know what you should never plug into a power strip.

As the temperature drops, many of us reach for that trusty space heater to keep warm.

But before you plug yours in this winter, there's a life-saving warning you need to know.

Winter is on its way, and with it comes increased risk — including the higher chance of house fires that many people may already know about. That's why it's extra important to be careful and make sure all your smoke detectors are working at home.

There's also another thing to watch out for. Something that has been warned about since 2017 but is still just as important today.

"You should never plug a heater into a power strip," the Umatilla County Fire District #1 in Hermiston, Oregon, warned on Facebook, back in 2017.

Utamilla County Fire District #1 - They even posted a photo of a fried multi-outlet to prove the point. "These units are not designed to handle the high current flow needed for a space heater and can overheat or even catch fire due to the added energy flow."



The post quickly went viral, racking up more than 17,000 shares, and hundreds of people shared their own hair-raising stories.

"I had a household one catch on fire years ago," one Facebook user commented.

"Good thing I woke up."

"I never knew this," another said.

The warning isn't just theoretical.

Can reach 500°F to 600°F

There are countless examples of firefighters being called out because of this. For instance, in 2017, the Toledo Fire Department in Ohio also issued a warning after responding to a house fire caused by a space heater. The heater had ignited a sofa, and firefighters emphasized:

"If you are operating them make sure you're operating them in a safe manner. Make sure there's a space at least a minimum of three feet around that space heater," said Sterling Rahe, Public Information Officer.

Space heaters can reach 500°F to 600°F, making them extremely dangerous if left unattended or used incorrectly. Firefighters remind everyone: always plug heaters directly into the wall, never a power strip, and keep an eye on them when in use.

"A lot of these fires, kind of have a common theme," Rahe added. *"Things were left unattended."*

The statistics are scary. From 2009 to 2013, heating equipment caused an estimated 56,000 U.S. home fires — killing 470 people, injuring 1,490, and causing \$1 billion in property damage, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Nearly half of these fires happen in December, January, and February, and space heaters alone account for two out of every five home heating fires.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) shares these five crucial tips for staying safe with your space heater:

1. **Turn them off and unplug them** when you leave the room or go to bed.
2. **Keep a three-foot safety zone** around the heater.
3. **Plug heaters directly into wall outlets** — never an extension cord or power strip, and don't plug anything else into that outlet.
4. **Install smoke alarms** on every floor and outside sleeping areas; test them monthly.

5. **Place heaters on flat, level surfaces** — never on furniture, cabinets, or carpet.

Extension cords and power strips are handy for chargers or lamps, but they aren't built for space heaters. The extra energy can make them overheat, spark, and even start a deadly fire.

The Umatilla County Fire District put it bluntly on Facebook:

“The weather is getting colder, and people are pulling out their space heaters. We just wanted to remind you that you should NEVER plug a heater into a power strip. These units are not designed to handle the high current flow needed for a space heater and can overheat or even catch fire due to the added energy flow. Please share and stay safe this Winter season.”