



# TECHNICAL UPDATE

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## PERSONAL APPLIANCES IN THE WORKPLACE

Supervisors are often at odds with employees who want to bring personal electrical appliances into the workplace. The presence of devices such as space heaters, small refrigerators, mug warmers, fans, lamps, air purifiers, and decorative lights may make the workplace more comfortable for an individual employee; however, they may not be in the best interest of the employer or property.

Appliances may create safety hazards, significant noise pollution or potential water damage. In addition, they may pose disruptions to the workplace, such as interference with lighting and building power. They may even create odors to which other employees may be sensitive.

To control such negative exposures, CTSI recommends counties should establish and implement a policy restricting or controlling the use of personal home appliances in the workplace. Important considerations to include:

- State which appliances are deemed acceptable, require approval or are not acceptable. Explain the process for obtaining permission to bring appliances into the workplace.
- Require appliances to be powered down at the end of the day for fire safety and energy conservation.
- State that the employer is not responsible for theft or damage to personal property.
- Electrical appliances should be restricted to a centrally located break area, limiting the number needed to adequately serve employees in any building. Personal appliance use outside this central area is discouraged.
- Newer appliances have protective circuitry such as auto shutoff and fail-safe breakers incorporated into them by the manufacturer. These disable the appliance if it is tipped over, overheats, or otherwise malfunctions and are highly recommended.
- Limit the use of extension cords and prohibit plug multipliers. If the number of appliances in a designated centrally located area requires additional outlets, these need to be professionally engineered and installed.
- If the centrally located kitchen or break area has a sink, all electrical outlets within six feet of that sink must be protected by a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI).
- Personal heaters should be considered extreme fire hazards. If allowed, these must be equipped with protective circuitry to guard against tip-over and overheating. Older models seldom have these features. If allowed, keep these devices in the open, away from combustibles.
- Candles or similar items with open flames should be forbidden in all county facilities.

### BEST PRACTICES

The following best practices are provided to assist in establishing parameters for the safe use of common electrical appliances in the workplace.

All appliances should be:

- Plugged directly into a permanent electrical outlet.
- Positioned to reduce power cord strain or damage.
- Removed immediately when there is any sign of damage to appliance components.
- Operated according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Powered down and unplugged at the end of each workday or placed on timers.
- Placed away from any portion of an exit.
- Situated out of traffic areas to avoid creating a tripping hazard.



### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COUNTIES

CTSI doesn't set the policy on whether or not personal appliances are allowed, but recommends following all safety considerations and using extreme caution in determining how and where these appliances are used. Many counties operate in buildings that were wired prior to the advent of computers, microwaves, and other power-hungry modern devices. If you have any doubts, it is best to have a commercial electrician determine how many devices are too many for a facility's electrical system. For more information, contact CTSI at (303) 861-0507.