

# USE OF PORTABLE GAS HEATERS IN PUBLIC PLACES

Gas heaters are popular for heating permitted eating areas on footpaths and similar public places at cafés and restaurants. Some heaters are more suitable than others, and some situations can be unsafe.

This guide explains why some heaters are more suitable, and how to avoid unsafe situations.

A checklist covers key safety matters. Use the checklist when setting up heaters, and then at regular intervals, to ensure safety is maintained. It shows how to meet your responsibility for gas safety.

## THE RIGHT HEATER

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) strongly recommends that outdoor gas heating in public places be supplied from fixed piping (ie. from natural gas or from a remote LP Gas tank or cylinder). Freestanding portable gas heaters in public places should only be used where fixed piping systems are not feasible or where use is temporary, and then only when supervised by persons trained in safe use of that type of gas heater.

Portable heaters are NOT suitable for indoor use. Mobile air heaters (known as 'rocket heaters') are NOT suitable for confined public places. The pollutants from the burner will breach health guidelines for indoor air quality. Some people are susceptible to these pollutants and can be seriously affected.

Where piped gas is provided, semi-portable and fixed heaters can be fixed to suitable structures. This avoids dangers associated with the heater being knocked over and removes the potential hazard of handling and storing gas cylinders.

Heaters must have sufficient clearance from combustible materials and surfaces that could overheat and cause burns. The manufacturer's instructions will show the necessary clearances for radiant heaters.

Heaters must be certified by either the Australian Gas Association (AGA), SAI-Global or IAPMO (as shown by a badge attached to the heater). It is an offence to sell or supply a heater that is not certified. It is an offence for an unlicensed person to plumb-in a heater.

## FOLLOW MANUFACTURER'S INSTRUCTIONS

Always read and follow **the heater manufacturer's instructions**. These include matters such as clearances from combustible materials, instructions not to use heaters indoors, safety checks and regular servicing. If you disregard these instructions use of the heater may not be safe.

## MINIMISE QUANTITY OF STORED GAS

Your gas supplier will advise you of LP Gas storage requirements, but be aware that Standard AS/NZS 1596 does not permit storage or usage within a restaurant or a cafe of any cylinder more than 15kg capacity and a total combined capacity of 30kg for all cylinders present. Only 10kg of cylinder size is allowed per 10 square metre of floor area. The transfer of gas from one cylinder to another is termed decanting.

Decant filling an LP Gas cylinder is a job for trained persons. Serious injuries and damage have resulted from decanting going wrong. Decanting should not take place at catering and hospitality premises. Decant filling requires a dedicated area complying with the Standard AS/NZS 1596.

## CONFIRM EACH HEATER IS IN SAFE CONDITION

A damaged or malfunctioning heater must be removed from service (and marked 'do not use'). Gas flames and radiant panels that burn yellow or produce soot are not working properly and require servicing. Damaged hoses or leaking connections must be replaced.

## TRAIN OPERATORS IN SAFE USE

There must be a person assigned the responsibility for safe use of the heaters and the storage and handling of full and empty cylinders that are not in use. The person setting up a heater, and connecting and changing a cylinder, must be trained in these tasks. This must include knowing;

- ▶ appliance manufacturer's instructions;
- ▶ required clearances;
- ▶ how to do a leak check on connections (eg soapy water test), and;
- ▶ safe storage and handling of full and empty cylinders.

## MAINTAIN CLEARANCE FROM COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS

The manufacturer's instructions give required minimum clearances from combustible materials. For a typical patio heater this is from 300mm to 500mm above and to the side of the heater. For radiant panels this is from typically 750mm to over 1100mm depending on heater output.

Note that awnings and combustible movable panels must not breach the required minimum clearance in any position of adjustment.

## ENSURE STABILITY AND PROTECTION

The location of a portable heater must provide a level, stable base, and must not expose the heater to possible impacts or interference.

## REGULAR SERVICING

A heater should be serviced at least every two years and more frequently if recommended by the manufacturer. If the heater is hired, make sure the hirer arranges regular servicing.

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## GAS SAFETY HAZARDS ARISE FROM:

- ▶ Leaking gas igniting and exploding with devastating consequences. Leaking LP Gas tends to pool in low spots or seep through drains.
- ▶ Transferring LP Gas from one cylinder to another is particularly hazardous and should never be done at catering or hospitality premises.
- ▶ Radiant heat igniting nearby combustible materials, leading to serious fires.
- ▶ Hot surfaces causing serious burns when touched.
- ▶ Poisonous products of combustion accumulating in enclosed spaces and affecting health, and in extreme cases killing.
- ▶ Gas cylinder fires, leaks and explosions.

MINIMISE THESE HAZARDS BY SELECTING SUITABLE HEATERS, AND BY FOLLOWING SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR THEIR USE AND MAINTENANCE.



## IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS

IN AN EMERGENCY, CALL **000**

If you need further information on being **gas safe** you can contact:



**WORKSAFE**  
1800 136 089  
www.worksafe.vic.gov.au



**ENERGY SAFE VICTORIA**  
1800 652 563  
www.esv.vic.gov.au



**METROPOLITAN FIRE BRIGADE**  
9420 3866  
www.mfb.vic.gov.au



**COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY**  
9262 8444  
www.cfa.vic.gov.au



**RESTAURANT AND CATERING VICTORIA**  
9654 5866  
www.restaurantcatervic.asn.au



## CHECKLIST

SAFETY FEATURE	REQUIREMENT	COMPLIANT ✓ OR ✗
Heater model appropriate to service	Specified in manufacturer's instructions and heater marking. Outdoor heaters must not be used indoors	
Clearance of radiant surface, or top of patio heater, from combustible surface	Must include clearance from awnings or partitions. Specified in manufacturer's instructions and heater marking	
Clearance of mobile heater to avoid burns to persons or fabrics	Check by assessing when in use, and record as * _____ mm minimum	
Heater certified	Must be certified by AGA, SAI-Global or IAPMO (check for badge)	
Proper installation (of plumbed-in heater)	Must be done by licensed gasfitter	
Storage or usage of any cylinders indoors	For empty or nominally empty cylinders, and cylinders in use: the total allowable quantity is 10kg per 10m <sup>2</sup> floor area, up to a maximum total quantity of 30kg. Maximum cylinder size: 15kg	
Each heater checked for safe condition	Must be in safe condition	Also write in date of checks
Person responsible for gas safety	Must be designated, and familiar with this guide. Training records must be kept	Also name person
Training of person operating heaters	Must know manufacturer's instructions, clearance requirements, leak testing of connections, safe storage of full and empty cylinders	Also name person
Portable heater stability and security	On level and stable base and not exposed to impact or interference	
Regular servicing	At least every 2 years and more frequently if recommended by manufacturer (record period here * _____ )	Also show date last serviced

\* Enter details appropriate to your business.