

**OREGON**  
**Interpretive Ruling No. 93-73**  
**PORTABLE ELECTRIC HEATERS FOR MAIN SOURCE OF HEAT**  
**(revised 05/05/00, editorial only)**

**REQUESTED BY:** PPPI Manual Review Committee and City of Springfield.

**QUESTION:**

1. Are portable electric heaters approved for the only heat-producing appliance for comfort heating?
2. May a portable electric heater be used as the only heat-producing appliance for comfort heating for a single room, i.e. bedroom or a room added to an existing structure?

**APPLICABLE CODE SECTIONS:** Oregon Structural Specialty Code (OSSC), Section 310.11, The One and Two Family Dwelling Specialty Code (Dwelling Code), Section 108 and 303.6

**BACKGROUND:**

OSSC;

**310.11** Heating. Dwelling units, guest rooms and congregate residences shall be provided with heating facilities capable of maintaining a room temperature of 70°F (21°C) at a point 3 feet (914mm) above the floor in all habitable rooms.

and Dwelling Code;

**303.6** Required heating. Every dwelling unit shall be provided with heating facilities capable of maintaining a room temperature of 65°F. (20°C.) at a point 3 feet (914 mm) above the floor at the design temperature in all habitable rooms.

and;

**108.1** Alternate materials, methods and equipment. The provisions of this code are not intended to limit the appropriate use of materials, appliances, equipment or methods of design or construction not specifically prescribed by this code, provided the building official determines that the proposed alternate materials, appliances, equipment or methods of design or construction are at least equivalent of that prescribed in this code in suitability, quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability, dimensional stability, safety and sanitation. Compliance with specific performance based provisions of the current editions of the Oregon specialty codes, in lieu of a prescriptive requirement of this code shall also be permitted as an alternate. See ORS 455.060.

**108.2** Evidence submitted. The building official may require that evidence or proof be submitted to substantiate any claims that may be made regarding the proposed alternate.

Portable electric heaters are basically designed for sporadic use rather than possible round-the-clock use. The fact they are portable leads us to believe they are liable to be abused and, therefore, malfunction much sooner than a fixed unit. In Oregon, during 1977, 71 fires were caused by portable heaters; 76 occurred in 1978. The codes do not specifically approve or disapprove portable heaters. However, if such devices are approved, it is likely many more units will be used and the number of fires will increase proportionately.

**FINDINGS:**

This interpretation is authorized by ORS 455.060, Rulings on Acceptability of Materials, Designs or Methods of Construction and Attorney General's Opinion OP-5208 issued October 1, 1981,

which advised the statute permits authoritative interpretations of existing code requirements.

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION:**

SCAB (BCSB) rules, by interpretation, that portable electric heaters are not suitable for maintaining the code-required room temperature in dwellings.

(signed January 26, 1994)  
John Talbott, Chairman  
Structural Code Advisory Board

The recommendations and findings of the Structural Code Advisory Board are accepted and the conclusions are adopted.

(signed January 26, 1994)  
Gary Wicks, Administrator  
Building Codes Division

RESCINDED