

# Commission Proposes Ban On Unvented Gas Space Heaters

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## Release Details

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The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) today proposed a ban of unvented gas space heaters fueled by natural or liquid petroleum (LP) gas. These products present an unreasonable risk of injury to consumers who use them all across America, according to CPSC.

These heaters have been implicated in the carbon monoxide poisoning or asphyxiation deaths of at least 60 people since 1973 from carbon monoxide gas, a by-product of burning fuel.

Heaters that would fall under the proposal are unvented, self-contained, free-standing or recessed gas appliances used to warm limited spaces. Included would be unvented circulators, radiant heaters with open fronts, and closed-front wall heaters.

Inexpensive, the unvented heaters are used by many elderly and low-income groups concentrated in the southern and southwestern United States where central heating systems are uneconomical because cold temperatures are not prevalent. Some 7-10 million of these products may be in use.

A medium-sized unvented gas space heater costs about \$140 and generally is cheaper to operate than a vented heater.

The proposal would prohibit unvented gas heaters from being shipped into commerce by manufacturers 30 days after any final rule is issued.

While a ban would not prohibit individual use of the heaters, consumers who own them should be aware of the serious risks these devices may pose.

Because they do not have a vent to remove combustion wastes, the heaters in question depend on normal room ventilation to get rid of dangerous carbon monoxide gas. Inadequate ventilation or maladjusted burners, coupled with a normal reduction in room oxygen from burning fuel, can cause fatal levels of carbon monoxide gas to accumulate. Thus, poisoning or even death become a real possibility to an unsuspecting consumer.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning resemble those of the flu at first, with headache, dizziness, or nausea. Continued exposure to high levels can bring on collapse, unconsciousness, or death.

Many of those who died were asleep, which points up the dangerous nature of carbon monoxide. Since it is colorless, odorless, and tasteless, there are no warning symptoms for sleeping persons.

CPSC warns anyone using an unvented gas space heater to keep the room well-ventilated, and at first sign of a headache, dizziness, or nausea to turn off the appliance and open a window or door to see if the symptoms subside.

Vented gas space heaters and electric heaters are expected to capture about 90 percent of the market created by people looking for substitute products, CPSC estimates.

Switching from a medium unvented gas space heater to a similar vented product would cost about \$25-\$36 extra a year to operate at current fuel prices, according to the Commission.

Nor should the ban pose great hardships on the heating industry says the Commission. Currently, there are only three manufacturers of the unvented products. These three also make vented heaters.

Exempted from the proposed ban are: infra-red heaters, catalytic and noncatalytic camp heaters because they are not usually used in homes, and decorative gas appliances such as coal baskets, fireplace inserts, and gas logs because they are usually used in vented fireplaces.

Interest in unvented heaters was aroused by a petition from the Missouri Public Interest Research Group, St. Louis, which asked for a mandatory safety standard and labeling rules for all space heaters. The Commission concluded, however, after careful consideration that only the unvented gas space heaters described present an unreasonable risk of injury to consumers.

The proposed ban will be published for public comment in a forthcoming issue of the Federal Register which will also announce a public meeting at which all interested persons may present their views. The public will also be requested to send their written views to the Commission by the end of March. Written views should be submitted to: Office of the Secretary, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207.