



**Cuivre River
Electric Cooperative**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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The truth about electric space heaters

Everywhere you turn, a "new and improved" electric space heater model is touted as the hottest new craze to reduce energy use. To help you sort fact from fiction when you consider purchasing a space heater, Cuivre River Electric Cooperative Manager of Member Services Kevin Hurd revisits some basic information that applies to most electric space heaters — however attractively they are packaged.

Hurd says, "You should do your homework and become an educated consumer before purchasing a space heater."

First and foremost, it is possible to see significant savings, but there are some big "ifs:" (1) IF you are willing to lower your central heating thermostat by 15-20 degrees (for example, from 70 degrees to 50 degrees) and (2) IF you only want to heat one room at a time. Depending on your heating system, you can save 1% to 3% on the heating portion of your electric bill for every degree you lower your central heating system thermostat.

A key component of space heating is the "space." If you heat only the space you use, you can reduce your overall energy consumption. In theory, there is no need to keep your entire home warm if you and your family only use one or two rooms most of the time. However, you may sacrifice convenience and comfort in the rest of the house to achieve the savings some advertisements promote.

Before you buy an electric space heater, think about how it will be used. This will help you determine the energy savings you can expect, and select a unit that meets your needs.

Typically, an electric space heater is used to improve the comfort level in a room where the central system is inadequate, or to boost the temperature of a room used by individuals who are sensitive to cold. When used in properly insulated and caulked areas for a few hours of the day, an electric space heater can be a wise energy management tool, and a good alternative to cranking up the central heating thermostat.

Hurd warns, "Don't fall for marketing jargon that seems to be unbelievable. A \$50 space heater could do the job as well as one that costs \$400."

Essentially, all watts are created equal. Most electric space heaters have heat output settings of 500 — 1,500 watts; some have a combination of settings. A heater that runs for one hour at the 1,500 watt setting will use 1.5 kilowatt-hours (kWhs). At Cuivre River's current average cost of 9¢/kWh, the hourly cost is about 13.5¢. If the unit operates 8 hours per day for 30 days, the monthly cost would be about \$32.

All electric space heating units are 100% efficient, (meaning 100% of the electricity they use is converted into heat), so do not be influenced by packaging or ads that emphasize super-high efficiencies. With the maximum of only 1,500 watts of heat, one of these units will not heat a room more than 150 square feet on average.

No discussion about space heaters is complete without reviewing safety concerns. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates more than 25,000 home fires every year are associated with gas and electric space heaters. When you purchase an electric space heater, make sure the unit has the latest safety features, including a child-safe grill, a low-temperature exterior, and a tip-over safety switch. Always make sure the heater bears the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label.

When using the heater, plug it directly into the wall outlet. If the power cord is frayed, worn, or broken, do not use it. If an extension cord must be used, choose a heavy-duty cord of at least 14-gauge wire. Never leave a space heater unattended and never leave the house or go to bed without turning off the heater. Always turn off and unplug the heater when it's not in use. Keep space heaters away from sinks, tubs, and other wet or damp places. Use and maintain space heaters according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Additional information on electric space heaters and other energy topics is available from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources at www.dnr.mo.gov, the U.S. Department of Energy – Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy at www.eere.energy.gov.

Contact Cuivre River Electric Cooperative at (636) 528-8261, (636) 695-4700, (800) 392-3709 or visit www.cuivre.com if you have questions or concerns about electric safety.

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