Gas Information Sheet No. 11

Heaters for outdoor use including public places

Gas heating for outdoor use has become very popular with the rapid expansion of outdoor facilities associated with hotels, restaurants and cafes. There is a growing trend towards portable heaters and occasionally heaters are located in public places including footpaths. This has caused some safety concerns ranging from heater stability to heaters becoming an obstruction for the disabled.

This information sheet provides guidance for those selecting or installing an outdoor gas heating source. In addition to the gas safety aspects, local councils may have other requirements, such as the need for planning approval.

General safety

- Operation or relocation of a heater in a public place by members of the public should not be permitted. Any form of gas heating in a public place should be supervised appropriately.
- The use of portable LP Gas cylinders in public places should be avoided unless properly safeguarded and supervised. Where cylinders are used, they must be located at least 1 metre from a doorway.
- When choosing an outdoor heater consider the likelihood of accidental damage, theft and vandalism.
- Whether the heater is purchased or hired, it is important to ensure that it has been certified by the Australian Gas Association, SAI Global or IAPMO. The certification number is usually on the data plate. Be aware that certification may only cover the actual heater and not any associated mounting frame or fixing method.
- The installation and operating instructions must be followed.

Types of heater

Three popular ways of providing outdoor heating are by mobile air heaters, radiant panel heaters and patio heaters.

Mobile air heaters

Although primarily designed for use in industrial premises, mobile air heaters (or 'rocket heaters') are often hired out for heating temporary structures such as marquees. They are normally supplied from 9 kg or 45 kg LP Gas cylinders. Care must be taken to ensure that the heater and the cylinder are located safely, and that the flexible hose and its connections are in good condition.

Heaters must be placed well away from combustibles and it is essential that plenty of ventilation is available. As these heaters are floor mounted, particular care must be taken to avoid causing burns to persons, especially where children or the elderly will be present.

Radiant panel heaters

The preferred method of installation for these heaters is that they must be fixed to a noncombustible structure, be at least 2.5 metres from the ground and have a permanent gas supply either reticulated or from fixed cylinders.
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For temporary or portable use radiant panel heaters are often fixed to a frame that also holds a 45 kg gas cylinder. Such frames should be trolley-mounted for mobility and security. To meet the recommended height requirements, some frames require extending prior to the heater being used. For safety reasons there should always be at least 500 mm between the heater and the cylinder. Wherever possible, portable radiant panel heaters should be placed against a wall so that they do not create a hazard or obstruction. When selecting a location, check that any combustible materials above the heater, such as canvas awnings, are well clear or adequately protected.

Patio heaters

Most installation aspects applicable to radiant panel heaters apply also to patio heaters. However, because patio heaters provide radiant heat throughout 360°, they need to be located in a more open area.

The preferred method of installation is to securely fix the patio heater by wall or ceiling mounting and connection to a permanent gas supply.

Patio heaters can also be pole-mounted with a weighted base and a 9 kg LP Gas cylinder. It is preferable to secure the base to the ground.

Where a patio heater cannot be permanently fixed, care should be taken to select a location not susceptible to disturbance. Avoid sloping or unstable surfaces. Be aware that the stability of unsecured heaters will reduce as the cylinder empties.

If further information is required, please phone the Gas Safety Technical Information Line on 1800 652 563.