

Office of the Fire Marshal Guidelines for Tent Heaters Used for Outdoor Dining and Outdoor Fitness Activities during the COVID-19 Emergency

The Office of the Fire Marshal would like to offer the following guidance to restaurants and outdoor fitness groups that use temporary tents for their activities during the COVID-19 emergency. On October 20, 2020 the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors updated an [ordinance](#) to temporarily allow outdoor dining and outdoor fitness activities, subject to certain conditions. The ordinance allowed tents to be used as shelter for these activities. With the advent of cold weather, enclosing and heating tents is needed for the comfort of guests.

Can I use heaters inside tents?

There are multiple styles of heaters that are on the market and available from tent rental companies. Certain heaters are allowed if they are listed by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory for how they will be used within the tent or on open patios.

Electric Heaters are allowed inside tents and do not require a separate permit from the Office of the Fire Marshal. There are fire code requirements for extension cords and electrical power that must be followed for safety. Importantly, electric heaters cannot be powered by extension cords and must be plugged directly into an approved receptacle. For the requirements for receptacles, visit Fairfax County [Land Development Services](#), 703-222-0801, TTY 711.

Portable gas-fired heating appliances:

- **Patio heaters or mushroom heaters** are only allowed outdoors, as long as certain safety conditions are followed. These safety precautions include, not using them indoors or inside a tent, maintaining a five-foot clearance from buildings, combustibles or exits, and ensuring a listed device is used with an integral fuel tank. A permit is not required from the Office of the Marshal for this style heater.
- **Catalytic heaters** are flameless heaters located inside the tent which create radiant heat using propane or natural gas fuel. A permit and approval from the Office of the Fire Marshal is required for this style of heater.
- **Ducted heaters** blow warm air into the tent through a duct. These heaters are often available from tent rental companies. Flammable liquids, such as gasoline, cannot be used as a fuel for an appliance within a tent. A permit and approval from the Office of the Fire Marshal is required for this style of heater.
- There may be other heaters you are considering. Any open-flame or exposed-flame appliance must be listed (such as UL) for the use and approved by the Office of the Fire Marshal prior to use inside a tent.

What safety provisions should I follow when using fuel for heaters and generators?

- Propane fuel tanks used by propane heaters must be kept outside the tent and located a minimum of 10 feet away from the tent and tent exits.
- A permit is required from the Office of the Fire Marshal when more than 10 gallons of propane is in use or storage. There will be no fee for businesses covered by the Outdoor Dining Ordinance. A permit application can be found [here](#).
- Protection from tampering and damage for propane tanks must be provided.




- Combustible liquids, such as diesel fuel, must be stored 50 feet away from tents.
- Refueling shall occur not less than 20 feet from a tent.

What other safety guidance should I follow when heating a tent?

- Smoking is not allowed inside tents.
- Generators shall be located a minimum of 20 feet from any tent. The exhaust should be directed away from tents, building entrances, and building air intakes.
- Please see the general [tent guidelines](#) for additional information.
- Use of a generator over 6500 watts requires a separate permit from Fairfax County [Land Development Services](#), 703-222-0801, TTY 711.

Guidance on submitting an application for a tent permit with the Office of the Fire Marshal can be found [here](#).

If the tent or membrane structure is in the Town of Herndon, contact the town Building Official at 703-435-6850  for information about associated electrical and special amusement device permits and inspections.

There are many more guidelines contained in the [Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code](#) that address specific installations. Not all situations can be covered in this summary document. For questions regarding this guidance, please contact the Office of the Fire Marshal at 703-246-4800, TTY 711 or by email at Fire.prevention@fairfaxcounty.gov.