

Consumer Product Safety Commission

New Electric Heat Tapes Help Prevent Fires: Safety Alert

CPSC Document #5045

To help prevent fires, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) urges homeowners (including residents of mobile homes) to replace uncertified heat tapes more than three years old. Uncertified heat tapes should be replaced with new heat tapes certified to meet recognized voluntary standards. At the present the following organizations are certifying heat tapes to meet recognized voluntary standards: Underwriters Laboratories (UL), the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and Factory Mutual Research Corporation (FMRC).

Electric heat tapes are used to keep water pipes from freezing. Heat tapes are usually installed in attics or underneath porches and homes, especially mobile homes. CPSC estimates there are about 2,000 fires, 10 deaths, and 100 injuries each year involving heat tapes. The use of certified heat tapes can help to reduce the frequency of these fires.

CPSC offers these safety tips for purchasing, installing, and maintaining electric heat tapes:

- Replace uncertified heat tapes more than 3 years old with new heat tapes certified to meet recognized voluntary standards. All new heat tapes will have a 3-prong plug.
- Always plug the 3-prong plug into a 3-prong outlet to make sure the heat tape is grounded.
- Use a ground-fault circuit-interrupter (GFCI) wherever heat tapes are plugged in.
- Do not wrap heat tape over itself unless specifically permitted in the manufacturer's instructions.
- Apply heat tapes directly on the pipe to be protected, never on top of the insulation covering the pipe.
- Do not cover the heat tape with insulation unless advised by the manufacturer. Use nonflammable insulation such as fiber glass. Do not use foam or vinyl insulation that could catch fire from a failing heat tape.
- Keep the end-cap sealed and off the ground to prevent water from getting in. Moisture can lead to a fire.
- Do not use heat tapes designed for water pipes on gutters, driveways, or fuel lines.
- If heat tape has a thermostat, check instructions to see if the thermostat should be placed against the pipe and covered with insulation or if it should be left hanging and uncovered.
- Inspect heat tapes each year and replace them if you notice signs of deterioration. Look for discolored surfaces (especially at the plug), charring, cuts or breaks in the insulation, or bare wires.
- Check installation instructions when you change types or brands of heat tape because different heat tapes have different installation requirements.

