

You asked.

We're answering.

This is the ninth in a series of responses to concerns expressed by members.

Member comment:

“Can one of the heavily promoted electric space heaters really save me money on my heating bill?”

Our response: Ads for space heaters abound during the cold months of the year, hyped with celebrity endorsements, examples of money-savings and new technologies.

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An electric space heater will provide heat at 100 percent efficiency, so for every one unit of electricity need for operation, one unit of heat is produced. In short, heating up a chilly room is no problem for a properly sized space heater. What may be a problem, however, is realizing a money savings by using a space heater.

According to Jerry Van Someren, the cooperative's manager of member services, "At the current cost of energy you can't save money with an electric space heater. Most people use natural gas or propane for their heating. You can reduce your gas bill by turning your furnace way down and using electric space heaters only in one or two rooms, but then you will be increasing the amount of electricity you use and increasing your electric bill. Now we don't want to discourage people from using electricity but we do want people to understand what to expect when they purchase an electric appliance."

"Heating your house for pennies a day does sound interesting," continued Van Someren, "but the companies that advertise that don't have west central Wisconsin in mind. We require large amounts of heat to stay warm in this climate.

Claims that you can heat your home for five cents a day don't work here. That five cents equates to 500 watts of electricity which won't even heat your house for half an hour. It's not even enough electricity to run a fan on a wood stove."

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Keep these tips in mind when shopping for an electric space heater:

- A more expensive model does not mean better heat. Don't be fooled by fancy frames and fireplace mantles. Instead, read the specification of the heater including how many watts it requires to operate and how many BTUs it will produce then compare several different brands to get an idea of typical pricing.
- Figure out your heating needs before you shop so you buy a properly sized heater.
- Research consumer publications before you make a purchase.
- Choose a model with a thermostat control to avoid running the heater when you don't need it.



Greg Brooks, Walton EMC

Purchasing an electric space heater to make a cool room or basement more comfortable can be a good solution as long as you realize that adding an additional appliance to your electric use will not result in a lower bill.

There are two basic types of electric space heaters: radiant and convection. A radiant heater increases the temperature of objects and people in close proximity to the heater. This type of heater is a good choice if the area to be heated is in direct line of sight of the heater, if instant heat is needed or if you will only be in the area for a short time.

A convection heater increases the air temperature. Hot air from the convection heater rises to the ceiling and the cold air sinks. The cold air is then heated again and circulates up to the ceiling. The cycle continues for as long as the heater is on. Convection heaters are available in a wide variety of sizes and styles. The type that heats water or oil and usually looks like a small radiator is a good choice. The heat transfer fluid helps maintain the temperature longer and provides a steadier heat source.



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