Dear Alice,

What are the benefits, risks, hazards of those infrared heat lights various companies sell? Thanks.

— Reddened

Answer

Dear Reddened,

Infrared heat lamps use low amounts of energy, have the ability to heat quickly, and are reasonably priced. The effects of infrared radiation on humans are normally only of a purely thermal nature, meaning that they can warm you up. There are two types of infrared heat lamps:

- **Gas powered infrared lamps** are usually used in commercial warehouses. They are heat intensive and must be positioned at least ten feet away from the person or area to be heated.

- **Electric infrared heat lamps** are most often used in homes. They used to be more common, but with the advent of new types of bulbs that diffuse various levels of heat and colors, consumers have a wider selection to choose from and it's rarer to see the infrared bulbs in use. Infrared bulbs are most commonly used today for heat lamps in bathrooms.

The potential hazards of infrared heat bulbs, lamps, and radiators are mainly to your skin and eyes. Because of the intense radiant heat emitted, prolonged exposure can result in severe burns to the skin. Your eyes are very susceptible to high-intensity short-wave infrared radiation as well. Long-term exposure to infrared radiation can permanently damage the eyes. It's recommended that folks wear goggles with special infrared absorbing glass if they're experiencing long-term exposure to infrared radiation.

Since these lamps generate intense heat, and contain a significant amount of pressure, they can easily shatter. If you're considering a quartz-type radiator, look for a low-pressure model. In addition, you should protect people and surroundings by employing proper enclosures, shields, lenses, and screens. Finger marks and scratches from handling should also be avoided as it
causes weakening of the bulb, and more frequent shattering.

Looking to get cozy with an infrared lamp? Here are some more safety tips:

- The maximum recommended amount of time for exposure for most body applications of heat lamps is 20 to 30 minutes.
- The lamp should never be placed closer than 18 inches from the surface toward which it is directed.
- Do not use infrared lamps near an infant, or a sleeping or unconscious person. They should also not be used by people with sensitive skin or poor blood circulation.
- Do not place the bulb directly over the exposed person unless a protective screen is placed between the lamp and the user.
- When in operation for extended periods, connect the lamp to a porcelain socket.
- Keep infrared lamps away from combustible materials, and materials adversely affected by drying action.

Stay warm,

Alice!

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