

TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR HOME AND FAMILY FROM ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

THE BURNING AND SHOCKING ISSUES OF YOUR HOME

Every morning in communities across America, news headlines tell the story of families whose homes or apartments were destroyed by electrical fires. Some of these fires were from electrical hazards that were readily seen and ignored. Others were the result of invisible hazards, but could have been prevented with current technology.

Keep your family and home safe. Here are a few basic steps you can take to eliminate electrical hazards around the home:

GFCIs: Keeping you safe from shock

- A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlet will automatically disconnect the power when an electrocution hazard exists.
- Be sure you have GFCI protection anywhere electricity and water are within six feet of each other, such as in your kitchen, bathroom and garage, to protect against electric shock.
- Test your GFCI monthly.
- If you have a home without GFCIs, consult a qualified, licensed electrician about adding this important safety device.

AFCIs: Fire safety in your home

- An arc fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) circuit breaker will automatically disconnect power when a fire hazard exists.
- If you live in a home without AFCIs, consult a qualified, licensed electrician about adding this important safety device.
- Have AFCIs installed on all general purpose circuits throughout the home, particularly in older homes where electrical hazards may have developed over several years.
- Install smoke alarms and CO detectors. Replace their batteries regularly.

Outlets: They may be warning you

- Check to make sure outlet and switch plates are not unusually hot to the touch. If they are, unplug cords and do not use the switches. Have a licensed electrician perform an electrical inspection as soon as possible.
- Discoloration and darkening around outlets and switch cover plates are signs of potential problems.
- No wiring should be exposed from behind outlet and switch cover plates. Replace missing, cracked or broken cover plates.

Extension Cord Safety

- Extension cords are for temporary needs – not permanent solutions.
- Not all power strips are surge suppressors. Not all surge suppressors can handle the same load. Be sure the equipment you buy matches your electrical needs.
- Check to make sure electrical cords are in good condition. Cracking and fraying are signs that the electrical cord needs to be replaced.

- To avoid overheating extension cords, make sure that they do not run under furniture or carpeting, behind baseboards or over walkways.

Space Heater and Lighting Safety

- Make sure to use the correct type and wattage of light bulb. If you do not know the correct wattage, contact the manufacturer of the lamp or fixture.
- Place halogen floor lamps away from curtains, buds, rugs or other furnishings. These lamps operate at high temperatures and can create a fire hazard.
- Space heaters should be placed at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs.
- Keep space heaters away from areas with water. Check your manual to be sure the heater is intended to be used in locations such as bathrooms and garages.
- Unplug and safely store portable space heaters when not in use.

Appliances Safety

- Make sure appliances are in good condition by looking for cuts and breaks in power cords and plugs.
- Outlets, switches, or cords that feel warm or hot to the touch may indicate an electrical problem.
- Electrical shocks—even mild ones—are an indication of an electrical hazard and should be checked by a qualified professional.
- Flickering lights, tripped circuit breakers or blown fuses are indications of possible electrical problems. Arcs, sparks, sizzles, buzzes or unusual odors in the vicinity of an appliance, receptacle, switch or lighting fixture are signs of an equipment problem.

Counterfeit Goods: Not all products are what they appear

- Counterfeit electrical products may look just like other appliances we buy, but their similarities end there. Counterfeits are not made to the same high standards and DO NOT offer the protection from fire and shock that certified products do.
- Buyers should beware of bargains that seem too good to be true. Products may be cheap because they are counterfeit or defective.
- Avoid no-name products and purchase from reputable retailers.
- Look for the UL, CSA or ETL-SEMKO certification marks. Check the warning label. It should be free of grammatical errors and not conflict with information elsewhere on the package.

ESFI reminds everyone that electricity is a powerful tool. It can also be a lethal hazard. Better safety standards have reduced electrical hazards that cause deaths, injuries and property damage. But good safety habits are still the best prevention against electrical hazards.

For additional electrical safety information, visit the Foundation's Web site at www.electrical-safety.org or call 703-841-3229.