

# Safety First



## Home Electrical Safety

According to the National Fire Protection Association, electrical problems are the source of 111,400 fires in the home every year. Causes can be attributed to faulty electrical distribution systems, appliances or heating and cooling systems. These fires claim an average of 840 lives annually, injuring 3,785 people and causing over \$1.2 billion in property damage.

If that fact alone is not enough to get your attention, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission also reported that in 1999, there were 440 accidental electrocutions in the United States, many of which were related to faulty wiring in homes or in products.

Startling statistics aside, electrical safety in your home should be an important issue for you and your family. The following tips can help you to uncover and correct problems in your home that can cause electrical fires or shock:

- Make sure light bulbs are the correct wattage recommended for your lamps. Also, make sure light bulbs are completely screwed into sockets. Loose bulbs can overheat and cause fires.
- Install ground fault circuit interrupters into all electrical outlets within six feet of water, like bathrooms, kitchens and outdoors. GFCIs can also be installed directly onto circuit breakers.
- Make sure all electrical cords are not frayed or have cracks in them. Also, do not put nails or staples through cords to attach them to walls or baseboards because it can damage the wiring. Use tape instead.
- If your house is 40 years old or more, have the electrical wiring inspected by an electrician. Other good times to have wiring inspected include when you are buying or selling a house or when you begin to notice electrical problems, like flickering lights or unusually warm switches or outlets.
- Do not overload outlets.
- Put plastic covers on outlets within children's reach that are not being used. Also, make sure faceplates are in place so wiring is not exposed.
- Extension cords should be used on a temporary basis only. Try to arrange furniture in rooms so all electrical fixtures can be plugged in without the use of extension cords.
- Never yank plugs out of sockets by the cord. Always grab and pull by the head of the plug.

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- Do not force plugs into an outlet and make sure plugs are not loose or worn. Also, do not remove the third grounding pin from three-prong plugs. These are designed to prevent electrical shock. Instead, use an adaptor.

- Do not run extension cords under carpet or furniture. If they get too warm, they can start a fire. Also, keep them away from places where people may trip over them.

- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from anything that may catch on fire, like blankets or drapery.

- Unplug all electrical appliances in the kitchen and bathroom when not in use.

- Invest in a Class “C” fire extinguisher for electrical fires. Never use water on electrical fires.

- Do not use electrical tools or lawn mowers on wet grass or in wet weather.

- Do not cover electrical blankets when they are being used, and never tuck them in.

- Consider surge protectors for computers and other sensitive equipment.

- If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse or trips a circuit breaker, unplug it immediately and have it repaired or replaced.

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