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Extension Cord Safety

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With the holiday season in full swing, it is important to follow instructions when using extension cords. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that each year about 4,000 injuries associated with electric extension cords are treated in hospital emergency rooms. Approximately half of these result from people tripping over extension cords. The CPSC also estimates that about 3,300 residential fires originate in extension cords each year, killing 50 people and injuring about 270 others. The most frequent causes of such fires are short circuits, overloading, and/or damaged or misused extension cords.

The National Electrical Code says that many cord-connected appliances should be equipped with polarized grounding-type plugs. Polarized plugs have one blade slightly wider than the other and can only be inserted one way into the outlet. Polarization and grounding ensure that certain parts of appliances that could have a higher risk of electric shock when they become live are instead connected to the neutral, or grounded, side of the circuit. Such electrical products should only be used with polarized or grounding-type extension cords.

Voluntary industry safety standards, including those of Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL), now require that general use extension cords have safety closures, warning labels, rating information about the electrical current, and other added features for the protection of children and other consumers.

Tips for safely using extension cords:

- Use extension cords only when necessary and only on a temporary basis. Do not use extension cords in place of permanent wiring.
- Do not remove the prongs of an electrical plug. If

plug prongs are missing, loose, or bent, replace the entire plug.

- Use extension cords that are the correct size or rating for the equipment in use.
- Only use cords rated for outdoor use when using a cord outside.
- Do not run cords above ceiling tiles or through walls.
- Keep electrical cords away from areas where they may be pinched or where they may pose a fire or tripping hazard.
- Always inspect cords prior to use to ensure the insulation isn't cut or damaged, and discard damaged cords.
- Never unplug an extension cord by pulling on the cord.
- Extension cords should not be run through walkways. Make sure cords are kept up and out of the way in order to prevent tripping hazards.

Extension cords are readily available and easy to use whether we are at home or at work. The key to extension cord safety is making sure we only use extension cords that are in good condition, rated for the job they are being used for, and that they are used properly. It only takes an instant for electricity to jump up and bite you and, in the end, that small fraction of time can end up being enough to cost you your life.

Source:
www.cpsc.gov

