



DATA COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS

Safety Center Bulletin DATE: December, 2002 SUBJECT: Extension Cord Safety

We here at the Safety Center Bulletin Desk wish you a happy and safe Holiday Season. In keeping with that wish, we offer these tips on Extension Cord Safety, an especially important subject during this season of lights.

Safe use of extension cords is important year-round, but especially around holiday time when you string up tree lights.



The lights may not look powerful, but when you link them, you may be unduly stressing your system. To avoid overloading, use a power bar (also known as a power strip) with several outlets and a circuit breaker.

- If you're short of outlets, it could be a sign that your wiring is outdated. Call an electrician to evaluate your system and to install new outlets.
- When using extension cords, make sure that the current rating (in amps or A) or your light string (or whatever else you're plugging in) doesn't exceed the extension cord's rating. If the product's current rating is higher than the extension cord's, the cord could overheat.
- Don't bunch mini Christmas lights together -- the excessive heat could melt the insulation and expose live wires. Metal tree ornaments could also pose a shock hazard if they make contact with frayed wiring.
- If you have an appliance with a polarized plug (one prong wider than the other) make sure the extension cord you use is also polarized. Avoid three-way plugs, the ones with receptacles for prongs on either side and the front. The extension cord you plug into it may not be heavy enough.
- It's important to keep extension cords out of the way so they don't become a tripping hazard. But don't wrap or bunch them together. Without enough space between them they can overheat and ignite nearby rugs, curtains, or paper. Never run cords under carpets or across doorways, where they can overheat or become worn.
- Check all cords and plugs for fraying, cracks, or loose connections. When in doubt, replace old cords.
- Extension cords are usually appropriate only on temporary or portable pieces of equipment. That makes them fine for your Christmas lights, for example, but unacceptable for a refrigerator or other major appliance.

Here are some other tips on using extension cords:

- Look for a certification label from an independent testing lab such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories) on the package and on the product. It indicates the product meets current industry safety standards. For extension cords, look for a permanently attached certification label on the cord near the plug. For power strips and surge protectors, inspect the underside of the casing for the manufacturer's name and the testing lab.
- Use electrical cords, power strips and surge protectors that have polarized plugs with one blade slightly wider than the other, or grounded three-prong plugs. These features reduce the risk of shock.
- Use special, heavy-duty extension cords for high wattage appliances such as air conditioners, portable electric heaters and freezers. Extension cords used outdoors should be specifically designed for such use.
- Insert plugs fully so that no part of the prongs are exposed when the cord is in use.
- Never cover any part of an extension cord with rugs or other objects while it is in use. If the cord is covered, heat cannot escape, which can result in fire or cause some one to trip.
- Do not overload cords with too many devices.
- If a cord feels hot to the touch, disconnect it and throw it away.
- Do not use extension cords to compensate for inadequate home wiring. Use extension cords only when necessary and only on a temporary basis.
- Do not overload outlets or force a plug into an outlet if it does not fit.
- Do not place any electrical appliances where they might come in contact with water.



If you follow these suggestions, or have your home inspected by a licensed contractor, you can help ensure the safety of your home for the upcoming Holiday winter season.