

Spread The Word About Bad Extension Cords

Even when extension cords, power strips, and surge protectors are being used correctly, some of these items can pose a serious fire and electrocution hazard.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported that in 1996 electrical cords and plugs were involved in about 7,100 fires resulting in 120 deaths, or about 32 percent of all deaths associated with residential electrical system fires. In 1997, more than 12,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for electrical burns and shocks, and about 2,500 people were treated for injuries associated with extension cords.

Since 1994, CPSC has announced 25 recalls involving two million extension cords, power strips, and surge protectors having undersized wires, loose connections, faulty components, or improper grounding.

Most of these faulty cords were sold at discount stores and small retailers. Most were made in China. Many have no identifying marks or model numbers. Some have counterfeit Underwriters Laboratories (UL) certification labels. Cords that do not meet industry safety standards can be easily overloaded by even small appliances.

- Use extension cords only when necessary and only on a temporary basis.
- Look for a certification label from an independent testing lab such as UL or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories) on the package and on the product itself.
- Use cords with polarized plugs or grounded three-pronged plugs.
- High wattage appliances need to be specifically designed for such use.
- Extension cords used outside should be specifically designed for such use.
- Always insert plugs fully so that no part of the prongs are exposed.
- Never cover cords with rugs or other objects. Trapped heat can result in a fire.
- Don't overload cords with too many appliances.
- If a cord feels too hot to the touch, stop using it, and throw it away.