

Electrical Safety at Home

There are many electrical safety basics that we pay very close attention to on the jobsite, this is a good thing. Unfortunately, we seem to forget all about many of these same safety basics once we get home. Although on the job safety is very important, safety at home is just as crucial. Home is where we keep our family and pets as well as all our stuff. Its safety should be our primary concern, but very often we let the simple, little things fall through the cracks and endanger our families and personal property.

The following Do's and Don'ts are everyday tips that will hopefully serve as a reminder of electrical safety basics that will help to keep your home and family safe.

- Do check that every bulb in any lamp or ceiling fixture is the correct wattage for its fixture. A bulb with wattage higher than recommended can overheat the fixture, wiring or any combustible materials that may be nearby.
- Don't use an appliance of any kind (lamps, TV's, DVD players, computers, video game systems, etc.) that has a frayed, cracked or in any way damaged cord. A damaged electrical cord may have exposed live wires that could be a shock or fire hazard.
- Don't put any type of electrical cord where it will be stepped on, have furniture or a rug resting on it. Cords in a traffic path will obviously be a trip hazard. Another issue is that cords can be damaged when they're stepped on. Also, any heavy weight, like a rug or furniture, can damage a cord by crushing the insulation or breaking wire strands.
- Don't wrap cords tightly around any object. Heat is trapped by wrapping cords; this heat usually escapes from loose cords. This increase in temperature can cause melting or weakening of the insulation.
- Do remove any nails or wire staples used to tack down a cord. Nails and staples can tear or crush a cord's insulation as well as cut the wires inside, creating a fire or shock hazard.
- Do check the electrical rating on appliances and extension cords and be sure an extension cord is carrying its proper load. A good rule of thumb to use as a guide would be 16 AWG handles 1,375 W, use 14 or 12 AWG for heavier loads. If a cord carries too much current the wires will get hot. If a cord, plug or outlet feels warm to the touch, it may be overloaded and can be a fire hazard.
- Don't use any extension cord on a permanent basis. Most extension cords are made of a smaller gauge wire than the permanent wiring in your home. Larger gauge wire is able to carry more current and is usually better protected from accidental damage that could lead to shocking or fire. Additional outlets should be installed or appliances moved to avoid the need for extension cords.
- Do position appliances to allow air to circulate around them. Allowing appliances to "breathe" can help prevent overheating and avoid a possible fire hazard.

- Do place all electrical equipment in a dry location away from any water source including rain, leaks and spills. Mixing water and electricity is a recipe for disaster that can result in serious shock or fire hazard.
- Do cover all unused outlets with safety covers, especially if children are present. Children are by nature, curious beings that often try to insert objects into outlets. This can result in the child suffering serious shock and burn injuries.
- Don't use an outlet if an electrical plug doesn't fit in snugly, these outlets should be replaced. Plugs that are loose-fitting can cause overheating and fire.
- Do have faceplates covering the wiring on all outlets. Exposed wiring is a shock hazard for everyone but especially for children who may stick objects into the wiring.
- Do unplug all kitchen and bathroom counter top appliances when not in use. Unattended appliances that remain plugged in can create an unnecessary risk of fire.
- Do keep all kitchen and bathroom appliances located away from the sink. Counter top appliances can be accidentally knocked into the sink or sprayed with water. Mixing electricity with water can lead to serious shock or electrocution.
- Do periodically check the fuse box or circuit breaker box. It is important that the correct size fuses are used to prevent overheating. Circuit breakers need to be exercised to make sure they haven't become stuck and are in good working order.
- Do be sure each outdoor outlet has its own weatherproof cover. Moisture can get into outside outlets and cause a malfunction and be a potential shock or fire hazard. It's important to also remember that covers don't keep water out when a cord is plugged into the outlet.
- Don't use a corded electric power tool around ponds, pools or other wet areas. Any time an electric tool is used around water there is the potential for electrocution.

By remembering these simple electric safety precautions that we use on the jobsite, we can help keep our loved ones safe at home.

For additional help with safety and OSHA compliance, take advantage of the resources available through NCMA. These resources include the NCMA Block Plant Safety Software. The software is available from NCMA at (703) 713-1900 at a cost of \$150 for up to 3 plants/year (nonmember \$450).