

Extension Cord Safety

Extension cords are convenient and often necessary in the workplace. However, they also pose a fire or electric shock risk, especially when worn out or used incorrectly. There are different types of extension cords, and the cord used for a job should match the environment (e.g., inside or outdoors) as well as the power requirements of the devices being plugged into it. Extension cords have maximum amperage limits which indicate the electric load limit the cord can safely conduct. You can check the instruction manuals of the devices you are plugging into the extension cord for their power requirements.

Two-wire Extension Cord

A two-wire extension cord has two prongs and will fit most outlets. It is only suitable for powering one or two small appliances. These types of extension cords are suitable for light indoor use for things such as lamps. Overloading an extension cord greatly increases the risk of electric shock or fire.

Three-wire Extension Cord

A three-wire extension cord has two prongs plus a grounding prong. These should only be used with grounded outlets and are appropriate for use outdoors and with power tools. A three-wire extension cord should always be used with power tools, unless the tool happens to be double insulated.

Outdoor extension cords are rated for occasional use, frequent use, and rugged cords. You can determine a cord's rating by checking for a designation letter on the cord jacket. An extension cord rated for outdoor use will have the letter "W" or the word "Outdoor" printed on its jacket.

Extension Cord Don'ts

- Don't use an extension cord marked for indoor use outdoors.
- Don't plug one extension cord into another.
- Don't overload cords with more than the proper electrical load.
- Don't run extension cords through doorways, holes in ceilings, walls, or floors.
- Don't move, bend, or modify any of the metal parts of the extension cord plug.

- Don't plug a three-prong into a two-hole extension cord.
- Don't force a plug into an outlet.
- Don't use an extension cord when it is wet.
- Don't overheat an extension cord.
- Don't cover an extension cord with anything.
- Don't drive over an extension cord.
- Don't drag an extension cord.
- Don't attach extension cords to the wall with nails or staples.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs or carpets or in high traffic areas.

Extension Cord Do's

- Do inspect an extension cord for physical damage before use.
- Do make sure all equipment and extension cords bear the mark of an independent testing laboratory such as UL (Underwriter's Laboratories).
- Do make sure the plug on an extension cord is fully inserted in the outlet.
- Do replace an outlet if a plug is too loose in the outlet.
- Do match up the plug and extension cord on a polarized cord (one hole on the plug is larger than the other).
- Do keep extension cords away from water.
- Do use GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) protection when using extension cords in wet or damp environments.
- Do pull on the plug, not the cord when removing an extension cord from the outlet.
- Do store extension cords indoors.
- Do unplug extension cords when not in use.
- Do keep slack in flexible extension cords to prevent tension on electrical terminals.
- Do put safety covers on the unused receptacle outlets on extension cords.

What This Means for Counties

Extension cords are used so frequently that most people don't give them much thought until they cause a problem. Check that your workplace is using extension cords safely. For more information, contact CTSI loss prevention at (303) 861 0507. 