

5 THINGS you need to know about electricity

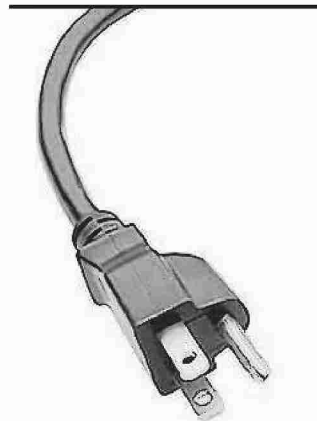
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With all the storms and power outages of late, it's difficult to remember a time when electricity — something most of us take for granted — was so keenly on people's minds. We thought it fitting to revisit some basic and, perhaps, not-so-obvious procedures for respecting the power of power.

Cableorganizer.com (a Web retailer that sells cable, wire and equipment management products) offers these tips for preventing electrical hazards.

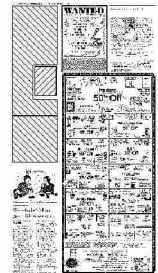
1 On the water front: What do you do if a plugged-in appliance (whether it's turned on or not) accidentally falls into a filled-up tub or sink? First, don't attempt to retrieve or unplug it. Go immediately to your home's panel board and shut off power to the corresponding circuit. Only then can the appliance be safely unplugged and removed from the water. Don't use the appliance until it has dried thoroughly and been evaluated by an electrician.

Also: If you live in an older home that predates ground fault circuit interrupters, get them installed (a relatively minor fix) in your bathrooms, kitchen, garage, anywhere that electrical outlets and water will be in close proximity. GFCIs detect current leakages or ground faults in electrical circuits (which would occur when a powered device made contact with water) and shut off power to that receptacle almost instantaneously.



2 More about water: Don't do yard work with electrically powered tools in wet conditions — and that includes sprinkler-wet. Furthermore, keep those power garden tools (electric hedge trimmer, weed whacker, lawn mower) unplugged and stowed away until the precipitation has stopped and grass and foliage are dry.

3 Listen to your appliances: If an appliance repeatedly trips a circuit breaker, blows a fuse or gives you shocks, it's telling you something is wrong. Have an electrician



inspect it and make repairs before you use it again.

4 Size matters: Make sure you're using the right size circuit breakers and fuses, lest you run the risk of a failure. If you're not sure, have an electrician take a look at your panel box and label it with the right circuit breaker/fuse size for easy future reference. Here are some other concerns:

- Avoid using cube taps, those little boxes that allow you to plug several appliances into a single outlet. It's too easy to overload a circuit, overheat wiring and possibly start a fire. If you absolutely must use one, do the math first. Know the maximum power demand that that cube-tapped receptacle can handle and be sure the collective power pull from all the devices you're plugging into it doesn't exceed that number.
- Know thy lamp. When choosing a light bulb for a lamp, consult the lamp's maximum wattage specification, which often is printed around the light bulb socket. Exceeding that wattage can lead to overloaded lamp wiring and possibly fire.

5 Be kind to plates and cords: Replace missing or broken wall plates, which don't just hang there and look pretty but also protect your fingers from making contact with the live wires behind them. And treat power cords gently. Don't nail or tightly tack them down. Check to make sure they're not pinched between or under furniture. Excessive pressure can damage the insulation on these cords or compress the conducting wire, which can lead to overheating.