

10 WAYS TO NOT BE SHOCKED

May is National Electrical Safety Month. It's also, according to the Web, Better Hearing and Speech Month, Better Sleep Month, National Good Car Care Month and Fungal Infection Awareness Month. But I'm not writing about hearing (well, maybe), sleep, cars or fungi.

So, from the experts at cableorganizer.com, I offer these 10 easy ways to prevent electrical hazards at home (No. 11 would be not having doorbell and light-fixture wires in the walls that go off into never-never land).

1. NEVER MIX WATER AND ELECTRICITY. Despite movies like "What Women Want" (Mel Gibson falls into a bathtub while holding a hairdryer and suddenly finds he can read women's minds), you should never retrieve a small appliance from water. Turn off the power at the breaker panel first.

2. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOUR APPLIANCES ARE TELLING YOU. If an iron, coffee maker or other small appliance repeatedly trips a circuit breaker or gives you shocks, it's not a coincidence. Unplug it and call an expert.

3. INSTALL GROUND FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS, OR GFCIS. These receptacles (they have red reset buttons) detect current leakages in electrical circuits and shut off power automatically when it happens. They're standard in new houses, and should be installed in kitchens, bathrooms and garages in older ones.

4. USE THE RIGHT SIZE CIRCUIT BREAKERS AND

FUSES. If they're not the right wattage rating, they'll fail when you need them most. If you aren't sure, have an electrician label your panel box with the circuit breaker or fuse size needed.

5. PROTECT CHILDREN BY USING OUTLET COVERS. Install either the plug-in type or special safety wall plates that have built-in, retractable covers. (The covers also, surprisingly, help prevent air leakage into and out of living spaces, according to wattwatchers.org.)

6. AVOID CUBE TAPS AND OTHER OUTLET-STRETCHING DEVICES. Cube taps are those little boxes that allow you to plug in several appliances to a single outlet. If you must use one, do the math: Know the maximum power demand the outlet can handle and don't exceed it.

7. REPLACE MISSING OR BROKEN WALL PLATES. They're not just for looks; they also prevent fingers from touching live wires — especially in the dark.

8. KEEP ELECTRIC YARD TOOLS DRY. Don't run that electric hedge trimmer or weed whacker in the rain.

9. MATCH THE LIGHT BULB WATTAGE TO THE RATING IN THE LAMP. Most lamps print the maximum wattage specifications around the socket. Pay attention.

10. BE KIND TO YOUR CORDS. Never nail or tack them down, and make sure they aren't pinched by furniture or doors.

