

Heed tips to use extension cords correctly and safely in your home

Just because an extension cord is long enough, it's not necessarily the right one for the job.

"Power extension cords are not created equal, but rather are manufactured for use in specific applications and environments, and to carry varying amounts of electrical current," said Christina Hansen of CableOrganizers.com. "By basing the extension cord choice on each task's specific requirements, you can greatly reduce the risks of fire, electrical shock, and injury that come with improper use."

Here are a few safety tips:

Classifications

Extension cords are classified for either indoor or outdoor use. The insulation, or jacket, of an outdoor-rated extension cord is made of a tougher material, which is designed to withstand temperature changes, moisture, UV rays, and (sometimes) chemicals. It's fine to use an outdoor power cord indoors, but never use an indoor-rated extension cord for an outside job ... doing so could cause electric shock or create a fire hazard.

Wattage rating

The number of watts an extension cord can safely transmit (given its length and gauge) is known as a wattage rating. Before plugging an appliance or power tool into an extension cord, make sure that the power demand (or pull) of that device doesn't exceed the cord's wattage rating.

Powering multiple devices

If you plan to plug more than one device into a given extension cord, calculate their combined energy requirements and make sure that the total isn't higher than the wattage rating for that cord.

Gauge and distance

Any electrical cord, extension or otherwise, contains an inner metal conducting wire, which carries electrical current from one end to the other. The

thickness of this conductor is referred to as its gauge. Gauge is indicated by a number; the lower the number, the thicker the wire is. A wire's thickness directly affects the amount of current (or wattage) it can carry over a certain distance.

Amps/volts vs. watts

In some cases, you may find power requirements listed in amps and volts instead of watts. For these situations, there's a simple formula that can help you calculate electricity requirements: just multiply the number of amps by the number of volts — the resulting number equals that appliance's wattage. Here's an example: if a

device uses 5 amps at 110 volts, that translates into 550 watts ($5 \times 110 = 550$).

UL approval

When shopping for extension cords, only purchase those that bear the UL symbol. The presence of the UL mark tells you that samples of that particular type of cord have been tested by Underwriters Laboratories and received consumer safety approval.

Red flags

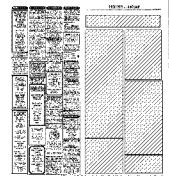
Don't use extension cords with cut or damaged insulation ... exposed conducting wires can put you at risk for fire, burns and electrical shock.

Alterations

Do not cut, file, or otherwise alter an extension cord's grounding pin or plug blades to make it easier to plug into an outlet! If the extension cord plug doesn't fit into an older outlet, have an electrician replace the receptacle.

Unplugging

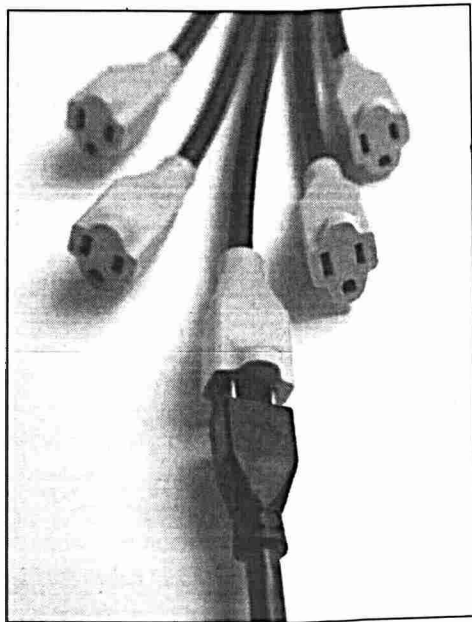
Regardless of whether or not it's being used, as long as a power extension cord is plugged into an outlet, it's conducting electricity. To avoid potential safety hazards, always remember to unplug extension cords when they're not in use.



Storage

Extended exposure to outdoor conditions can cause cords to deteriorate, so whether they're rated for indoors or outdoors, store all extension cords inside when they're not in use.

— Reprinted with permission from
www.cableorganizers.com



WWW.PHOTOS.COM