

Electrical Safety

Electricity is a necessary component of our lives, but with it can come the potential to cause harm. Correctly installed electrical systems in our homes should function properly indefinitely. But on the other hand, electrical fires cause many deaths in our country and injure many more. The top five causes of home fires are: overloaded circuits, improper use of extension cords, incorrectly installed wiring, failure of appliances or defects, misuse and lack of maintenance on electrical appliances.

Some solutions to these problems are:

1. Hire a licensed electrician to give you an honest appraisal of your home's wiring.
2. If you have an overhead power line connecting your home to local service, please make sure that there are no ladders, trees or equipment nearby to tempt anyone even a small child to climb up and put himself in dangers way.
3. Outlets in wet areas like bathrooms and kitchens should be GFI protected.
4. Make sure circuits are not overloaded.
5. Extension cords should never be run under carpeting or rugs.

The following is some basic information about electricity and its usefulness along with its dangers.

Electricity can enter the house underground or overhead. Either way, the electric panel is where it starts getting distributed to the various areas in your home. Every main panel box should have one breaker that turns off the power entirely to the house in case of an emergency. Either fuses or circuit breakers are used to direct electricity to its various paths and uses in your home. Items such as pennies or foil should never be put on a circuit breaker in the main panel. These items interfere with the ability for your breakers to work as they were meant to, which is to break the electric current in case of an overload. Don't use larger watt bulbs than your appliance suggests. If you have a breaker that is constantly trying to break or reset, call a licensed electrician. The cause could be anything from a frayed wire to a mismatched breaker.

Your outlets should be grounded outlets. Meaning each outlet should have 3 holes in each plug. One is a ground, the other 2 are for the electric prongs of your appliance. Use extension cords as little as possible. But if you have to use them, make sure they are the proper gauge wire for the job. Bath and kitchen areas along with outside plugs should all be GFI protected.

Make sure that your appliances are plugged in properly and match up accordingly to the correct size breaker. Shocks from electricity can kill or harm people. If you have any signs of shocking, sparking or arcing, unplug the appliance and call a qualified electrician.

Many extra/portable electrical equipment items are used in many households. For example, heating blankets or portable type heaters. If you use an electric blanket, check every year for dried or frayed wiring before you put it into use. If you use small portable heaters, be sure that they are not used in a wet area of the house and make sure they can't be easily tipped over by small children or they are not placed near flammable items.

Electric safety has to be taught when children are young. Teach them not to insert things into plugs and not to chew on wiring. Make sure that all live electrical wires are behind proper face plates or locked behind a control panel.

Common sense tells us not to use anything electrical near water. Young children may not know or understand this. Water and electricity do not mix. Shocks can kill. Our bodies make a good conductor of electricity.

Electrical hazards are not just located in the home. Be aware where your electricity comes from. Whether overhead or underground. If you are digging in your yard, have the spots marked by a credible company before you start your project. A shovel makes a good electrical current if you dig into the main electric power line coming into your home. Swimming pools should never be located under an overhead service. Don't fly kites in the backyard if you have an overhead service. Use appropriately rated exterior lights, appliances and plugs outside. Don't try to move a downed power line. If you are driving, and a power line goes down in front of you or hits your car, stay in the car unless the car catches fire. At that point, you would need to try to exit the car as quickly as you can without making contact with anything metal or wet and the ground at the same time.

IN REVIEW

- 1. The use of extension cords should be thought out. Don't use them anymore than necessary and match them up to the job they are performing.**
- 2. Don't leave clothes, curtains or combustible items in general near portable space heaters.**
- 3. Use electrical safety items when children are present in the home.**
- 4. Perform a periodic check on any of your exposed wiring such as lamps, appliances, heating blankets and hair dryers.**
- 5. Don't use appliances in wet areas without GFI protected outlets.**
- 6. Be aware of the main power source and call before you dig.**