

FIRE STOPS WITH YOU

On the Safety Circuit: A Factsheet on Home Electrical Fire Prevention

Electrical fires in our homes claim the lives of 700 Americans each year and injure 3,000 more. Some of these fires are caused by electrical system failures and appliance defects, but many more are caused by the misuse and poor maintenance of electrical appliances, incorrectly installed wiring, and overloaded circuits and extension cords. The United States Fire Administration (USFA) would like consumers to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from electrical fires.

The Problem

During a typical year, home electrical problems account for 90,000 fires, over 700 deaths, and \$700 million in property losses. Home electrical wiring causes twice as many fires as electrical appliances.

The Facts

December is the most dangerous month for electrical fires. Fire deaths are highest in winter months which call for more indoor activities and increase in lighting, heating, and appliance use. Most electrical wiring fires start in the bedroom.

The Cause

Electrical Wiring

Most electrical fires result from problems with "fixed wiring" such as faulty electrical outlets and old wiring. Problems with cords and plugs, such as extension and appliance cords, also cause many home electrical fires.

In urban areas, faulty wiring accounts for 33% of residential electrical fires.

Many avoidable electrical fires can be traced to misuse of electric cords, such as overloading circuits, poor maintenance and running the cords under rugs or in high traffic areas.

Home Appliances

The home appliances most often involved in electrical fires are electric stoves and ovens, dryers, central heating units, televisions, radios and record players.

Safety Precautions

- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring.
- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- Use electrical extension cords wisely and don't overload them.

- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floors and counters; pay special care to electrical appliances in the bathroom and kitchen.
- When buying electrical appliances look for products which meet the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) standard for safety.
- Don't allow children to play with or around electrical appliances like space heaters, irons and hair dryers.
- Keep clothes, curtains and other potentially combustible items at least three feet from all heaters.
- If an appliance has a three-prong plug, use it only in a three-slot outlet. Never force it to fit into a two-slot outlet or extension cord.
- Never overload extension cords or wall sockets. Immediately shut off, then professionally replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker. Use safety closures to "child-proof" electrical outlets.
- Check your electrical tools regularly for signs of wear. If the cords are frayed or cracked, replace them. Replace any tool if it causes even small electrical shocks, overheats, shorts out or gives off smoke or sparks.
- Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.