

Electrical Safety in the Office

Since we spend at least 30% of our lives at our jobs, it makes sense that we would want to make our work area comfortable. In addition to the many pieces of equipment essential to do our work (computers, telephones, facsimile machines) many of us like to bring into the office other “comforts of home.” These things may include radios, drink warmers, desk lamps, clocks, fans, and even space heaters, microwaves and coffeepots. This is fine as long as a few safety rules are kept in mind.

Electricity flowing through common household appliances has the potential to shock, burn, and create heat hazards like fires and arc blasts. Since these are your personal items it is your responsibility to keep them in good condition and properly use them.

Read the Label

Manufacturers go to great lengths writing instructions that limit even the most obvious misuse of their product. Take advantage of it! Always read and follow the labels on appliances and cords.

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Grounding

Your chances of avoiding an electrical injury are largely up to you. 95% of electrical accidents happen because of a faulty, improperly grounded or misused appliance.

Never remove the grounding post from a three-prong plug.

Some of our older buildings only have two prong outlets. If these types of outlets are properly grounded, then and only then, may a three-to-two prong adapter be used on a three-prong appliance.

Inspect cords and ensure they are not frayed. If they are, let an electrician repair the cord or you can recycle the appliance. Do not try to tape the cord or continue to use it in poor condition.

Electricity runs though every path available to it. So when you touch a live electrical component – even though the appliance may be grounded – you become part of the electrical path to ground! Anything more than .01 A is enough to cause irreparable injury (that includes death!)

Never overload appliances and circuits. It's easy to avoid. Simply add up the amperage load before you plug things in. If, for example, you are plugging multiple items into a powerstrip having a “15 A (amp)” current maximum, just add up the amps of the appliances you plan to plug in.

[If an appliance lists voltage and watts, instead of amps, apply this formula: Amps = Watts/Volts]

“Daisy Chains” are out – don't string together or use extension cords for other than a single temporary purpose. They are not meant as permanent wiring.

Water and electricity don't mix! Of course! Keep electrical appliances and cords high and dry. Few (and very expensive) appliances are designed for use in wet conditions. Anything else presents an electrocution risk near water.

A few precautions will make your comfortable office a safe one.

Source: OSHA Subpart S 1910.300 - .399
For more information please contact your Facilities office or EH&S Manager