

Maryland State Firemen's Association

Fire Prevention and Life Safety Committee

TIP Sheet: EXTENSION CORD SAFETY



EXTENSION CORD SAFETY



There are 3 questions you should ask yourself before you reach for that extension cord.

1. Will I use the extension cord indoors or outdoors?
2. What is the total wattage rating of the appliances I'll use with the extension cord?
3. How far is the nearest outlet from where I'll be working?

These are three very important questions to ask yourself, so that you will be prepared when reaching for an extension cord.

Just because the first extension cord you find in your garage has the length to reach the outlet across the room, it doesn't mean it's the proper one to use for the task at hand. If a power tool is drawing more current than an extension cord can carry, it may cause the cord and tool to overheat and create a fire.

- Before deciding which extension cord to use, first carefully read the manufacturer's instructions for the power tools you will be using. The booklets will also indicate whether the tools are suitable for use outdoors.
- Likewise, the first step in determining which extension cord you will need is to decide whether you will be using the appliance **indoors or outdoors**. Extension cords that can be used outdoors will be clearly marked "**Suitable for Use with Outdoor Appliances.**" Never use an indoor extension cord outdoors; it could result in an electric shock or fire hazard.

- To determine what size – or gauge – cord you will need, you will also have to determine how long you need the cord to be. A cord, based on its gauge, can power an appliance of certain wattage only at specific distances.
- All appliances indicate how much wattage is consumed when operated; that rating can be found on the appliance itself and often within the use and care booklet that accompanies the product.

Quick tip: if your appliance indicates that it uses 5 amps at 125 volts, then its wattage rating is 625W (5x125).

- If you are going to use the extension cord with two or more appliances, you must add together the wattage rating for all appliances used on the cord.

Additional safety tips to consider with any electrical appliance:

1. Look for the UL Mark on extension cords you purchase.
2. Store all cords indoors when not in use.
3. Never keep an extension cord plugged in when not in use.
4. Do not use extension cords that are cut or damaged. Touching even a single exposed strand of wire can give you an electric shock or burn.
5. Never file or cut the plug blades or grounding pin of an extension cord or appliance to plug it into an old outlet.
6. As a safety feature, extension cords and most appliances have polarized plugs (one blade wider than the other). These special plugs are designed to prevent electric shock by properly aligning circuit conductors.
7. If a plug does not fit, have a qualified electrician install a new outlet.
8. By using extension cords properly, you and your family can enjoy longer, safer use of your power tools and garden appliances and other household items.