

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Preventing Fires Caused by Electrical Cords

[Reference 1910.305(g)(1)(iv) / 1926.405(g)(1)(iii)]

Electricity is something we all take for granted. It does its job, day after day, without us actually seeing it or even giving it a second thought. But this complacency can lead us to ignore potentially unsafe conditions that, if left unchanged, can lead to a fire starting, or even an electrocution. Here are a few examples of such conditions:

- Using staples, nails or similar devices to attach electrical cords to the wall – Nails, staples, wire, and similar objects can break through the insulating jacket of electrical cords; either immediately when they are applied, or later after months or even years of wear and tear. This could eventually lead to sparks or excessive heat building up and igniting a fire.
- Running electrical cords through doorways or windows – If the door or window gets closed, the cord can become pinched, which can damage the outer jacket of the cord. This too could eventually lead to sparks or excessive heat build-up, igniting a fire.
- Using electrical cords rated for indoor use outdoors – Cords intended for indoor use only are not designed to stand up to extreme outdoor conditions, such as cold, ice, wetness, or excessive heat. These conditions can weaken the cord and cause it to deteriorate, which could lead to sparks or excessive heat build-up igniting a fire. Check the tag on the cord or the packaging it came in to determine where it is, and is not, designed to be used.
- Overloading an electrical cord – Electrical cords are designed to provide for a certain amount of electricity to be drawn through the cord (usually expressed as “amps”, or amperage). Overloading a cord by using it to power equipment that draws too much current can cause it to over-heat, possibly starting a fire. Check the tag on the cord or the packaging it came in to determine the maximum amperage for which the cord is rated, and compare that to the amperage drawn by the equipment attached to that cord.
- Leaving unsafe electrical cords in service – If you find a cord that is being used improperly, or is damaged, please notify your supervisor immediately, or turn it in to the person(s) responsible for replacement and/or repair. DO NOT try to repair a cord unless specifically authorized. Your quick action could prevent an unfortunate accident from occurring.

Does anybody have a question or comment about unsafe conditions and uses for electrical cords that could lead to fires, or even electrocutions? Please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending this training session.