

Loss Control Insights

Extension Cords

Extension cords directly caused more than \$58 million in property damage between 2009 and 2013. They are a useful tool but must be used with caution especially as people add increasing numbers of electronic appliances to homes without enough outlets to support them. However, extension cords are meant for temporary use, and they can be dangerous if safety precautions are not followed.

Each extension cord has a rating. Keep the total number of watts in use on the cord below the cord's rating. Avoid connecting multiple sets of extension cords together for extra length or to plug in more items. You are likely to overload the circuit and cause a fire. Also keep in mind that power loss begins after 100 feet. This causes strain on your products. Running the cord under furniture or rugs heats it up and adds to the overload. It raises your fire risk substantially.



Using an appliance on an extension cord not rated for one is likely to start a fire. Use an appliance extension cord for a small appliance and unplug it when not in use. Extension cords are also rated for indoor or outdoor use. Using an indoor extension cord outside raises your risks of fire or electrocution. Use heavy-duty extension cords for electric tools.

Powering an electrical device that does not have a cord long enough to reach an outlet is the purpose of an extension cord. But an indoor extension cord is much different from an outdoor extension cord. An outdoor extension cord can be used indoors, but never use an indoor extension cord for outdoor use. Knowing the difference between the two types of extension cords will eliminate safety hazards.

The main difference between indoor and outdoor extension cords is the insulation used to construct the different types of cords. Indoor extension cords do not have the same materials and protective insulation surrounding the wires as do outdoor extension cords. Outdoor extension cords have more durable insulation to protect the cords from moisture and outdoor temperature changes. Sunlight can break down the insulation used for indoor extension cords, but outdoor extension cords use material to protect the insulation from sunlight damage. Outdoor extension cords are also constructed to prevent damage from chemicals, such as oil, but indoor extension cords are not.

The gauge of an extension cord is the size or diameter of the conducting wires on the inside of the cord. Indoor extension cords do not have the same gauge of wires as outdoor extension cords do. The primary reason is that indoor extension cords rarely come in lengths longer than 25 feet, while outdoor extension cords come in lengths up to 150 feet or more.

As always ~ be safe!