

Electrical Fires

Electrical fires in our homes claim the lives of 200 Americans each year and injure 1500 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.

December is the most dangerous month for electrical fires. Fire deaths are highest in winter months which call for more indoor activities and increases in lighting, heating, and appliance use. Most electrical wiring fires start in the bedroom. The following safety precautions will help you prevent an electrical fire in your home:

- When using appliances, follow the manufacturer's safety precautions. Overheating, unusual smells, shorts, sparks and sputters are all warning signs that appliances need to be shut off, then replaced or repaired. Have an electrician check the wiring in your house. Unplug appliances when not in use.
- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring.
- Never overload extension cords or wall sockets.
- Do not place cords and wires under rugs, over nails or in high traffic areas.
- Immediately shut off, then professional replace, light switches that are hot to the touch and lights that flicker.
- Use safety closures to "child-proof" electrical outlets.
- Frayed wires can cause fires. Replace all worn, old, or damaged appliance cords immediately.
- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floor and counters; pay special care to electrical appliances in the bathroom and kitchen.
- When buying electrical appliances, look for products which meet the UL standard for safety.
- Don't allow children to play with or around electrical appliances like space heaters, irons and hair dryers.
- Do not trap electric cords against walls where heat can build up.
- Keep clothes, bedding, curtains and other potentially combustible items at least 3 feet from all heaters.
- Only use lab-approved electric blankets and warmers. Check to make sure the cords are not frayed.
- 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.
- 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.
- Replace mattresses made before the 1973 Federal Mattress Flammability Standard. Mattresses made since then are required by law to be safer.