

Home electrical safety checklist

Inspect your home for the scenarios below and make any necessary changes right away to keep your home and family safe. As always, never try to tackle a project beyond your skill level. And if you are unsure, contact a professional.

Electrical cords:

- Do any cords show signs of damage? Are they cracked, loose, or frayed? If so, replace the cord and/or the device it is connected to.
- Are there cords that pinched or folded in doors or windows, or under heavy furniture? Relocate them to prevent damage, which can cause electric shock or a fire hazard.
- Do any cords run across doorways, under rugs, or in other high-traffic areas? Move them to a safer location.
- Are any cords held in place with staples or nails? Remove the fasteners and examine the cord for damage. Replace the cord if needed.
- Do you rely on extension cords on a daily basis? Extension cords are meant to be temporary. If need be, have a professional install additional outlets in your home.

Wall outlets and switches:

- Are any outlets or switches missing faceplates? Do they have cracks or other damage? If so, replace them.
- Do any outlets have several items plugged in using a multi-plug block? Overloaded outlets overheat and create a fire hazard. If you don't have enough outlets for all of your electronic devices, contact a certified electrician to install additional ones.
- Does your home use "regular" outlets in the kitchen, bath, laundry, or other areas near water. If so, arrange to have ground-fault circuit interrupters, or GFCI outlets, installed. These outlets check for dangerous ground faults by monitoring for discrepancies between the incoming and outgoing current. If an anomaly is found, the outlet interrupts the flow of electricity to prevent electric shock.

- Are there kitchen appliances, space heaters, hair-care devices, power tools, or other large electrical devices plugged into a power strip? This can lead to overheating or a fire, so always plug these types of appliances directly into the outlet.
- Do your outlets or switches have discoloration, produce a burning smell, or give you a mild tingling sensation when touched? Call a professional electrician to have them checked for faulty wiring or other hazards.
- Consider installing arc-fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) outlets, which shut off electricity if it is arcing, or "jumping" between two connectors.

Portable space heaters:

- Is a heater located closer than three feet from curtains, furniture, or other combustibles? Find a flat, stable surface at a safe distance to relocate it.
- Do you have space heaters without tip-over protection? Replace the unit with one that has this important safety feature.

Electrical system:

- Do you have frequent issues with blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers? What about flickering or dimming lights? Call a professional electrician right away to have your home's electrical system evaluated for potential problems.

This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but it does explain how to spot — and correct — some of the most common electrical safety hazards in your home. For additional electrical safety information, visit the Electrical Safety Foundation International at www.esfi.org or the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at www.cpsc.gov.

