

**WASHINGTON DC FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL**

Informational Bulletin #2008-1

Updated July 2008

Dennis L. Rubin, Fire Chief

Gary L. Palmer, Fire Marshal



Prevention of Fires Caused by Electrical Sources

Facts:

U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 20,900 reported home structure fires involving electrical distribution or lighting equipment in 2005. These fires resulted in 500 civilian fire deaths, 1,100 civilian fire injuries, and \$862 million in direct property damage.

WARNING SIGN: FREQUENT OR RE-OCCURRING ISSUES WITH BLOWING FUSES OR TRIPPING CIRCUIT BREAKERS

If a fuse opens or circuit breaker is tripped, be sure to investigate the cause before replacing the fuse or resetting the breaker. If necessary, call a qualified electrician to investigate the cause.

WARNING SIGN: A TINGLING SENSATION WHEN YOU TOUCH AN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE OR OTHER METAL OBJECTS

Getting a shock when you touch appliances in your house can indicate a more serious problem. Be sure to unplug the appliance and discontinue use.

WARNING SIGN: DISCOLORED OR WARM WALL OUTLETS, OR SPARKS FROM AN OUTLET

This can indicate arcing, smoldering, burning happening behind your outlets, damaged or improperly installed wiring in the outlet, or a problem with the receptacle itself. Avoid using the outlet or switch and contact a qualified electrician as soon as possible.

WARNING SIGN: A PERSISTENT BURNING SMELL COMING FROM AN APPLIANCE, ROOM, OR AREA

This can indicate that the appliance is overheating or malfunctioning. Unplug the appliance or turn off

WARNING SIGN: FLICKERING OR DIMMING LIGHTS

This sign could indicate a short in the wiring, dangerous arcing, or an over-extension of your home's electrical systems. Contact a qualified electrician to discuss potential reasons for this problem and to have an inspection completed.

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. Top Causes of Electrical Fires

LAMPS, LIGHT FIXTURES, AND LIGHT BULBS

According to the National Fire Protection Association, lamps, light fixtures, and light bulbs (28%) and fixed wiring (22%) accounted for the largest share of fires among major types of electrical distribution equipment. Cords and plugs (39%) accounted for the largest share of civilian deaths. Lamps, light fixtures, and light bulbs (30%) accounted for the largest share of civilian injuries.

EXTENSION CORDS

According to the National Fire Protection Association, extension cord fires outnumbered fires beginning with permanent or detached (cords that can be detached from appliances) by more than two-to-one. For civilian deaths, the ratio is more than three-to-one. For civilian injuries, the ratio is more than four-to-one.

What to Ask a Landlord

Our lives depend on the safe use of electricity in our homes and apartments. In fact, electricity is a leading cause of home fires in the U.S. Even what might appear as a minor problem, can lead to fire. If you rent your home or apartment, there are important questions that you should ask of your landlord that will help protect you and your family. Please consider asking your landlord some or all of the following questions.

When was the last time my residence was inspected by a qualified electrician?

Has my residence ever experienced an electrical fire?

What kind of wiring does my residence have?

Are tenants permitted to do electrical work in their residences?

Are outlets in the bathrooms, around kitchen countertops, basement, and outdoors protected by a GFCI?

Who is responsible for testing my GFCI outlets on a monthly basis?

If I suspect there is a problem with my electrical wiring, who should I contact?

Am I permitted to contract out to get my own inspection of the electrical system?

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