



The Office of Risk Management | February Newsletter

Extension Cord Safety



We have all seen the common do's and don'ts for extension cord safety (don't use a frayed cord, tape down a cord that might present a trip hazard, etc.). But how do users and those with oversight know if the extension cord is safe?

We recommend establishing a standard for identifying when and where extension cords are permitted (residential facilities, classrooms, temporary IT/AV setup, labs, library, offices, shops, outdoor work, housekeeping, theater, auditoriums, chapel, stadium, gym, food service, etc.).¹ Consider including a provision that describes how to report offending cords, who has authority to remove offending cords, and what to do with confiscated cords. Also consider including observable characteristics of acceptable extension cords, such as:

Polarized or 3-Prong Plug

- All extension cords should either be polarized (one prong is wider) or grounded (a round prong in addition to the two-flat prongs).
- Cords not including one of these code compliant safety features should immediately be removed, and either be repaired or destroyed.
- Outlets that cannot accept grounded or polarized plugs should be replaced by a licensed electrician.

Correct for the Environment

- Indoor cords are typically designed with two or three visible parallel insulated wires.
- Indoor cords for heavy-duty use should be jacketed (an insulating cover over all the individual insulated wires).
- Outdoor cords must always be grounded (3-prong plug) and jacketed.

UL Approved

Every extension cord should have a label identifying it as UL Listed.

Rated for the Load

The wattage rating imprinted on the cord or attached label should meet or exceed the wattage of the attached device or tool.

Permanent Work

- Extension cords should not be tacked down (tape is okay to avoid trip-and-fall hazards), or passed through a wall or door.
- If long-term use is required, an electrician should install code approved conduit and outlet(s).

¹ The risk management considerations provided here are for general duty use, and are not sufficient to meet the stricter safety standards for use in special services such as a medical facility, explosive environment, or where control of radio frequency interference is an issue.

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