Fired Up for Payson

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Plug Safety into Your Home

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the National Electrical Safety Foundation, every year incidents involving electrical items, such as extension cords, receptacles, and light bulbs, result in more than 41,000 residential fires that claim about 350 lives and cause over 1,400 injuries. These fires also cause more than $620 million in property damage annually.

The following items can help prevent electrical fire hazards around your home:

Electrical cords:

- Avoid running extension cords across doorways or under carpets.
- In homes with small children, unused wall sockets and extension-cord receptacles should have plastic safety covers.
- Consider having additional circuits or outlets added by a qualified electrician so you do not have to use extension cords.
- Do not consider extension cords part of your home's electrical system—use them only for temporary situations.
- A frayed or cracked cord could cause a shock or fire. Replace old and damaged extension cords.
- Do not overload an extension cord. Check the rating labels on the cords and the appliance. If necessary, upgrade to a higher-rated cord. If cords feel warm to the touch, there may be too much demand for the cord in use.
- Do not staple or nail cords in position at any time; if the cord does not remain where desired, use tape or twist ties to secure it.

Receptacles:

- Receptacles are inexpensive. Replace any that are broken, no longer hold a plug securely, feel hot to the touch, spark or make noise when inserting or removing a plug.
- Replace broken faceplates so you don't accidentally touch a plug to a live portion of the receptacle.
- Do not use a multi-plug adapter for extended periods of time. If you need more receptacles, add a new receptacle (and circuit, if necessary).
- Never install a three-slot receptacle where there is no ground available.
- Use lockout receptacles or childproof plugs if young children are or will be present.
- When possible, avoid the use of "cube taps" and other devices that allow the connection of multiple appliances into a single receptacle.

GFCI receptacles (right) can be identified by the "Test" and "Reset" buttons.

Testing a GFCI receptacle

Plug a radio, hairdryer, or other appliance into the GFCI, turn the appliance on, and then press the test button. The receptacle should shut itself off. If it doesn't, press the test button again. If it still doesn't shut off, the receptacle needs to be replaced. By the way, don't be too surprised if the receptacle doesn't shut off. It's estimated that up to 25 percent of all GFCIs in this country are malfunctioning due to power surges or lightening strikes. If the receptacle did pass its test, press the reset button; the power should come back on.

Light Bulbs:

If you've ever touched a hot light bulb, you know just how hot it can get— up to 300 degrees Fahrenheit for a 100-watt bulb. So, keep anything that could burn away from light bulbs. Light bulbs, especially the newer halogen types, get very hot and can ignite combustible materials that get too close. Clothing or towels should never be placed atop a lampshade and table lamps should not be used without a shade where they might fall over onto a bed or sofa. Most light fixtures are labeled to show the brightest bulb that can be safely used in that fixture; too high a wattage bulb can cause the fixture to overheat and start a fire.

Some clues that you may have an electrical problem are:

If the lights dim every time you turn on an appliance that circuit may be overloaded or have a loose connection. If sparks appear when you insert or remove a plug, it could be a sign of loose connections. If an electrical cord is warm to the touch, the cord is under rated or defective. When a fuse or circuit breaker keeps tripping, it is an important warning sign of problems. A light bulb that burns out frequently is a sign that the bulb is too high a wattage for the fixture.

In Case of a Fire

If an electrical fire starts at a wall outlet, pull the plug or turn off the main switch. Call the fire department or 9-1-1, give them your address and tell them it's an electrical fire. If the fire is small, use your home CO_2 fire extinguisher. Never put water on an electrical fire. If in doubt, get everyone out. If the fire is large, call the fire department and try to turn off the main power source. Do not try to handle the fire yourself.

Until next time be *"Fired Up"* about electrical safety in your home.