

Electrical Fire Safety

Old and poorly maintained electrical appliances, plugs and cables can be dangerous. Just because there's no flame does not mean there's no fire risk.

Cables, switches, socket-outlets and other equipment deteriorate with prolonged use, so they all need to be checked and necessary replacements or repairs made in good time.

It's not only electrical faults that start fires; human error is often to blame. Whether it's a badly wired plug or an iron left on – we all need to take more care.

We use electricity every day. Don't take it for granted. It can be dangerous. Treat it with respect. Use the following advice to reduce the risk of electrical appliances putting you and your family at risk from fire.

Wiring

Check the condition of your wiring – This should be done by a qualified electrician when you move into a new home and then once every 10 years. If you rent your home, it is the landlord's responsibility; ask to see a copy of the certificate or report confirming that the electrics meet the UK national standard BS 7671 (Requirements for Electrical Installations).



Plugs and Sockets

Check for hot plugs or sockets, scorch marks, fuses that often blow, or flickering lights - they are all signs of loose wiring or other electrical problems and should be checked by a qualified electrician without delay.

Cables and Leads

Check for fraying and other damage. Ensure that the outer sheath of the flex is fastened under the clamp within the plug and the wires are held firmly in place inside the plug. Never run cables or leads under carpets as any damage to it will go unseen.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service

Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX

Tel: 01473 260588

Email: fire.businesssupport@suffolk.gov.uk



Electrical cables get naturally warm. When using an extension cable, ensure that it is pulled out fully from any containing drum so that heat cannot build up within the wires. Trailing leads should contain the correct fuse and conform to BS 1363/A.

Adaptors

So-called 'multi-way or block adaptors' are devices that allow you to plug in more than one appliance per socket. These should not be used unless you know exactly what you are doing: You need to know the power which each attached appliance draws and that each adaptor and socket in the chain will cope with the loads placed on them.

This can be complex and if you are in any doubt you should consult a qualified electrician.

Overloading a socket by using several adapters, or too many high-power appliances, can cause overheating and fire. Use sockets safely – it's better to use a bar adaptor (multi board) on a lead than a block adaptor.

Only use one adaptor per socket – don't plug one adaptor into another and try to keep to one plug per socket.

Remember that **'one appliance, one socket'** is the safest practice.

Fuses

Electrical circuits rely upon the correct use of circuit breakers/fuses to cut the power to the appliance in the event that something goes wrong. When an electrical appliance goes wrong, it can heat up more than it normally would, which has the potential to start a fire.

A broken or missing fuse will prevent an appliance from working at all, and so there is no risk of that appliance causing a fire under those circumstances. However, a working but incorrect type of fuse can actually allow a malfunctioning appliance to keep operating in conditions which might cause it to start a fire.

When you're fitting or replacing a fuse, it's important to use the right fuse for the appliance to make sure the fuse doesn't overheat. Check the manual or look for a sticker on the appliance to find out its wattage.

- for appliances up to 700 watts, use a 3 amp fuse
- for appliances between 700 and 1,000 watts, use a 5 amp fuse
- for appliances more than 1,000 watts, use a 13 amp fuse

Extension leads and adaptors have a limit on how many amps they can take, so be careful not to overload them, to reduce the risk of fire.

Never connect one extension lead to another extension lead.

General precautions

- Switch off and unplug all electrical equipment when not in use
- Some appliances are designed to be left plugged in or even switched on when not in use. While this may be a requirement of the appliance's function, it does increase the risk of an electrical fire. If in doubt, ask the manufacturer of the appliance or the shop from which you bought it
- Electricity can be complex. Consult a qualified electrician unless you know exactly what you are doing.

Dealing with an electrical fire

Only if it is safe to do so, pull the plug out or switch off the power at the fuse box; sometimes this can stop the fire immediately. It is important that you know where the mains isolation switch is so that you can turn off the power if there is a fault.

Never use water on an electrical fire and don't take any risks with your safety.

Get Out, Stay Out and Call 999

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