



# Huntsville Center *Safety Gram* *Engineering the Edge for Safety Excellence*

**8 May 2012**

## **ELECTRICAL SAFETY**

FORT RUCKER, Ala. (May 1, 2012) – May is Electrical Safety Month, and officials are encouraging everyone in the Army Family to stay aware of potential hazards and understand the importance of electrical safety.

Electrical Safety Foundation International is the sponsor of the annual observance. According to their website, ESFI is dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety at home and in the workplace through education, awareness and advocacy.

In the United States, electrical problems cause more than 51,000 home fires annually, resulting in more than 490 deaths, 1,400 injuries and \$1.3 billion in property damage, data from the National Fire Protection Association show. Another 400 Americans are electrocuted each year, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

“Observing Electrical Safety Month gives the Army an opportunity to really think about ways to keep Soldiers, Civilians and their Family members safe while they’re around electricity,” said Al Brown, a safety and occupational health specialist at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center.

Between fiscal 2007 and fiscal 2011, the Army experienced an average of 30 electrical accidents per year, peaking in 2008 with 46 reported accidents and 2 fatalities.

“Most electrical accidents result from unsafe equipment or improper installation of equipment, an unsafe environment or unsafe work practices,” said Mike Evans, a safety and occupational health manager with the USACR/Safety Center. “We can prevent these accidents easily through the use of insulation, guarding, grounding, electrical protective devices and safe work practices. Folks need to be vigilant not only in their work areas, but at home too.”

The National Fire Protection Association recently released an updated version of NFPA 70E, Standard for Electrical Safety in the Workplace. Brown said if safety managers correctly implement the guidelines outlined in the update, the Army would see an even further reduction in electrical injuries across the force.

In addition to receiving information from safety managers, individuals can educate themselves on electrical hazards by contacting their local or installation fire department for training materials and tips on keeping their home or workplace safe.

“Safety in the workplace is crucial and something all Leaders and supervisors should enforce to ensure proper procedures is followed when working with electricity,” Brown said. “The human factor associated with electrical accidents can be immeasurable. No one can replace a worker or loved one who has died or suffered the irreparable consequences of an electrical accident.”

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“Electricity is a necessity in everyday life, both at work and at home,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Stidley, USACR/Safety Center. “Yet many people take electrical safety for granted by overloading extension cords or using them as a permanent fix in their homes and work areas. Fire is a very real hazard with tragic consequences. Respect the power of electricity.”

### Electrical Safety Tips

- Replace or repair loose or frayed cords on all electrical devices.
- 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.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for plugging an appliance into a receptacle outlet.
- Avoid overloading outlets. Plug only one high-wattage appliance into each receptacle outlet at a time.
- If outlets or switches feel warm, shut off the circuit and have them checked by an electrician.
- When possible, avoid the use of "cube taps" and other devices that allow the connection of multiple appliances into a single receptacle. Use only one appliance at a time.

### Extension Cords

- Extension cords should be for temporary use only. They are not intended to replace permanent household wiring.
- Cords should be discarded if they are cracked or frayed
- Cords should be used according to their ratings (indoor or outdoor use) and according to the power needs of the appliance that is being plugged in
- Never nail or staple cords or use cords that are coiled or bent.
- If the cord is hot to the touch then it should be replaced with a cord that has a higher wattage capacity.
- Always unplug the cord by pulling on the plug and not the cord.

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### Polarized and 3-Prong Plugs

- Polarized plugs have one blade that is slightly bigger than the other. This design makes sure that plugs are plugged into outlets correctly and also reduces the risk of electric shock. **NEVER** shove a polarized plug into a non-polarized outlet or extension cord.
- 3-prong plugs also help to reduce the risk of electric shock. **NEVER** remove the 3<sup>rd</sup> prong in order to make it fit into a 2 prong outlet or extension cord.

### Light Bulbs

- Check the lamp's wattage and use the appropriate watt light bulb.
- Switch from incandescent bulbs to florescent bulbs that are cooler and use less electricity to produce the same amount of light.
- Make sure that light bulbs are screwed in securely to prevent overheating.
- Place lamps on level surfaces, away from things that can burn.
- If you smell a faint burning or rubbery smell from a lamp then the wattage level of the light bulb is too high for the lamp and it should be replaced with the appropriate bulb.

### Appliances

- Make sure that all appliances have been tested by an independent research laboratory and be sure to follow all manufacturers' instructions carefully.
- Appliances that take a lot of power to operate, such as space heaters and halogen lamps, should be plugged directly into an outlet. These appliances should not be plugged into extension cords.
- **One Outlet One Plug!** Don't overload electric outlets with several plugs. If multiple appliances must share one outlet, be sure to use only one appliance at a time.

### Water and appliances don't mix!

- Don't leave appliances plugged in where they may come into contact with water.
- If an appliance falls into water DO NOT reach in to pull it out. First turn off the power and unplug the appliance.
- Don't use electric appliances or take showers or baths during an electric storm. Using electricity during an electric storm increases your risk of getting an electric shock.

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### Hunt for Home Electrical Hazards

Keep an eye out for these warning signs. If any of these are present in your home there could be a risk of an electric fire or electrocution.

- Frequent power outages or blown fuses. This may indicate that your home wiring needs to be updated or repaired. Contact a licensed electrician.
- Overloaded electrical outlets
- Dim or flickering lights
- Sparks or sizzling sounds in outlets or walls
- Overheated plugs, cords or switches
- Smells of something burning or rubbery smells
- Frayed wires or cracked cords
- Feeling a mild shock or tingle when you plug in an appliance.

### Starting a New Outdoors Project?

In Alabama, call 1-800-292-8525 before any digging or excavation work to prevent any electrical danger.



**Respect electricity — don't get zapped!**

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