Neighborhood Safety Tips

It's hard to imagine a home without electricity in the United States, but using it can have dangerous consequences.

From 2014 to 2016, an estimated

24,000

residential building electrical fires

were reported to United States fire departments each year.

310 deaths

850 injuries

$871 million in property loss

Residential building electrical fires resulted in over twice the dollar loss per fire than residential building nonelectrical fires did.

Residential building electrical fires occurred most often in one- and two-family dwellings (83 percent).

Residential building electrical fires occurred most often in the winter month of January (12 percent).

In only 17 percent of residential building electrical fires, the fire spread was limited to the object where the fire started.

Residential building electrical fires most often started in bedrooms (15 percent) and attics or vacant crawl spaces (13 percent).

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), during 2011, 364,500 fires were reported which caused 2,450 deaths, 13,900 injuries, and more than $6 billion in property damages. Winter months are the most fire-prone due to more use of heating devices, electrical appliances and lighting. The highest losses occurred in residential buildings. In most cases, flawed electrical wiring, failure of electrical appliances, overuse of extension cords, and overloading of electrical sockets, caused the fires. To prevent the possibility of fire-breakouts, and to safeguard yourself and your loved ones, we guide you through the most common reasons why electrical fires happen, and what can be done to protect your family, your building, and all your valuable possessions.

Common causes of electrical fires and the best preventive measures

Old electrical sockets and unsafe appliances

Appliances that are old and overused and those that fall short of modern safety standards are the worst culprits. Frayed electrical cords, self-jointed wires, and worn out sockets that are not properly grounded are major causes of fires. They become ready outlets for directing heat and fire to carpets, rugs, curtains and combustible plastic. Older appliances draw more power than the wall sockets can handle.

Prevention Tips:

Increase the frequency of checking of electrical appliances, and closely inspect cords and plugs.

- Replace defective electrical cords as fast as you detect them, and never attempt to repair them yourself.
- Buy appliances that use quality materials, and follow approved safety standards.
- Install ground fault circuit interrupters and surge protectors that will guard all major appliances; use only protectors and power strips that are authorized by reputed testing laboratories.

Using light fixtures that exceed the permissible wattage

A very common cause of fires is plugging lights, lighting appliances and bulbs into electrical sockets that cannot handle higher wattage levels. Antique lighting appliances may have defective wiring that makes the appliance unstable by overheating. Decorating lights with colored paper and cloth shades can increase the risk of fire when the material or fabric heats up.

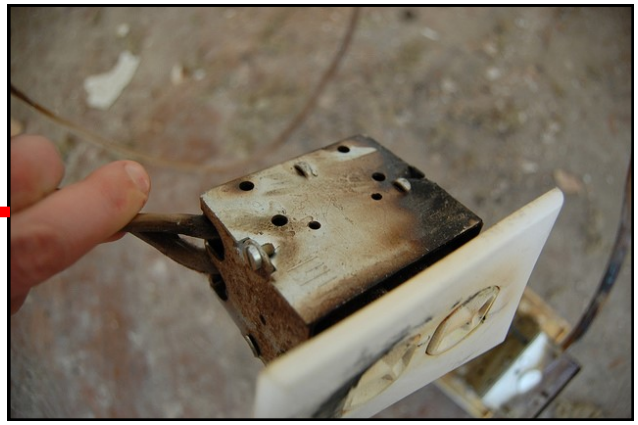
Prevention Tip:

Ensure that all light bulbs and lighting devices are plugged into electrical sockets that match the prescribed wattage. Avoid using extension cords for lighting purposes.

Using multiple appliances plugged into an extension cord

Unrestricted use of extension cords is a major fire hazard. The risk of fire increases when your TV, home theatre, computer and other appliances are all plugged into a single extension cord. This creates excessive power load on a single socket which may not be designed to handle that load. In the recent past classes at Middle School and East Pennsboro Elementary School had to be cancelled owing to a power outage caused by damaged wiring. So, there is a social and economic cost to damaged wiring!

Prevention Tip: Get the electrician to install power outlets matched to appliances that you frequently use. Avoid plugging appliances into multi-socket extension cords. The best course is to avoid using extension cords altogether.



Common causes of electrical fires and the best preventive measures (continued)

Locating portable heaters near combustible materials

Portable space heaters that use coils are potentially dangerous when they are positioned carelessly near curtains and rugs and adjacent to beds and cloth covered furniture. The chances of inflammable material coming into contact with the red hot coils increase the risk of fire.

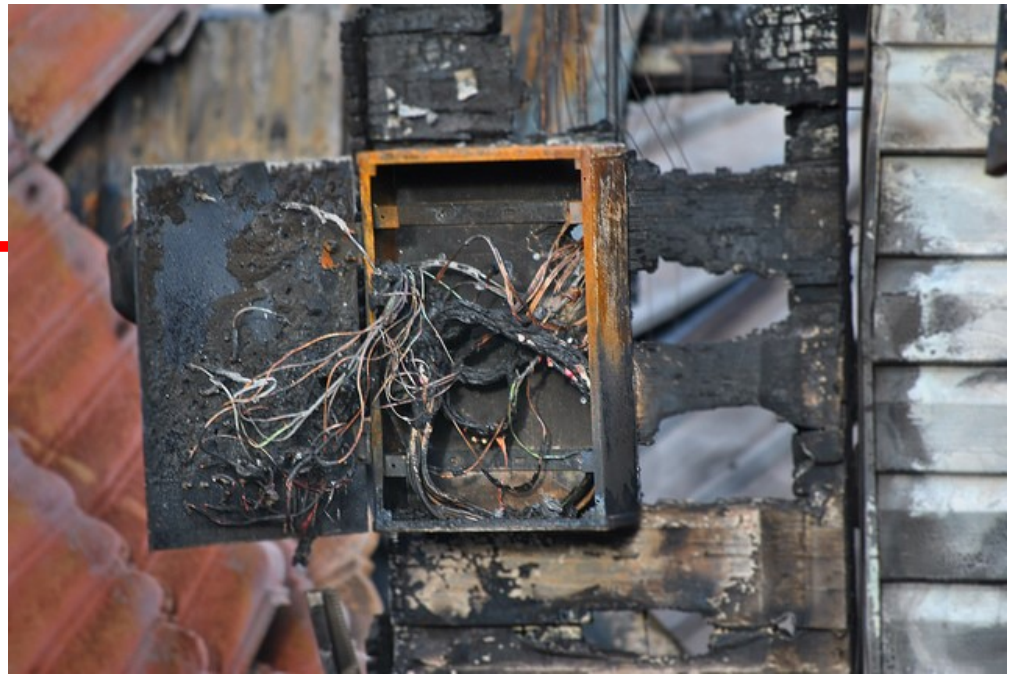
Prevention Tip: Ensure that inflammable materials are positioned well away from portable space heaters. Better still, use radiation heaters that do not catch fire on direct contact.

Wiring that becomes defective with the passage of time

Over a period of time you add more electrical appliances such as wide screen televisions, home theatre, microwave oven, refrigerator and air conditioners. The outdated home wiring cannot handle the increased power load. Older wiring tends to heat up quickly and catches fire. If the breaker boxes are themselves defective, they cannot prevent overheated electrical panels from catching fire. Faulty electrical wiring was responsible for spreading fire in a local home.

Prevention Tip: Call an expert electrician to look over your home. Detect and replace old wiring immediately, and you would be eliminating the biggest threat to electrical fires that your home could be exposed to. Beautifying your old home, landscaping your garden and redecorating the bedroom are important for enhancing the aesthetic beauty of your home. But the safety and security of your home and your family are equally, if not more, important.

Get an expert to conduct a thorough electrical safety audit of your wiring, external power panels and electrical wall outlets. Install good quality smoke detector alarms and fire extinguishers to bolster your chances of surviving any electrical fire, saving lives and minimizing damage.



FOR MORE SAFETY TIPS OR QUESTIONS,
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