



# Safety Scene

## Extension Cord Safety

by Molly E. Butz

### How to avoid hazards when using extension cords.



**TIP:** Need to know the wattage rating of your tool or appliance? Multiple amps times volts for the answer. For example, if your tool indicates that it uses 5 amps at 125 volts, then its wattage rating is 625W or 5x125.

### at a glance

- Damage to cords can cause an electrical shock or fire.
- Frayed extensions and three-prong cords that are missing their ground prong are examples of cords that are dangerous.
- Adding an extension cord check to weekly safety walkthroughs is an easy way to make sure all cords are in safe working condition.

Aside from a hammer or tape measure, they probably seem like the most simple tools: extension cords. They're handy, too; an extension cord allows you to move electricity to virtually anywhere in your facility. The key to using them safely is to ensure your extension cords are kept in good working condition.

Frayed or nicked extension cords, or three-prong cords that are missing their ground prong are dangerous. This type of damage to cords can cause an electrical shock, and they also present a potential fire hazard. Here are some simple ways you can ensure your extension cords stay in good shape!

- Always visually inspect an extension cord before you use it; check for external defects such as loose parts, bent/missing pins, or damage to the outer layer/insulation.
- Also check for potential internal damage, such as a pinched or crushed outer layer.
- Unplug all extension cords when they're not being used and store them inside, in a cool, dry place.
- Remind your folks to firmly and fully insert the plug of the cord into the outlet.
- When unplugging an extension cord, pull directly on the plug as close to the outlet as possible rather than tugging further back on the cord.
- Ensure the proper cord is being used for the job. Compare the wattage rating on the cord with the wattage rating on the tool you're plugging in and make sure the cord has an equal or higher rating.
- Although sometimes unavoidable, whenever possible, use one extension cord at a time; stringing multiple cords together is unsafe.
- Never plug a three-prong plug into a two-prong extension cord.
- Avoid driving forklifts or other equipment over extension cords.

### Appropriate Uses & Timely Repair Conserve Cords

Extension cords serve a very valuable purpose, to make electricity available in places where it is not. However, extension cords are meant to be used for temporary needs and should never be "mounted" to a wall using nails or staples. If you find that an extension cord is needed in one or more areas often, consult with a licensed electrician about installing additional electrical outlets.

Long, heavy duty cords can get a little expensive. Luckily, if you can catch it before it's too far gone, most minor damage to extension cords can be quickly and inexpensively repaired by your maintenance department. With that in mind, it's a good idea to make extension cords part of your weekly safety walk-through and immediately remove from service any cords in need of repair. Just be sure damaged cords are repaired by a qualified maintenance person.

Spotting an extension cord with a notch of missing protective sheathing or a plug that's pulling away from the rest of the cord may seem inconsequential, but even a small amount of damage can lend itself to a much bigger safety issue. Keep your plant running strong and your employees safe with well-maintained, reliable extension cords. Safety first! **SBC**

*To pose a question for Safety Scene, contact Molly at [mbutz@qualtim.com](mailto:mbutz@qualtim.com).*

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