

Electrical Safety Tips for Your Home

*Protect your family and
your property.*



- Handle electrical equipment and appliances properly.
- Know the required permits and inspections for electrical work.
- When hiring someone to do electrical work, verify licenses and certifications.



Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries

Electrical Program

General safety

- Make sure you securely screw in light bulbs. Loose light bulbs can overheat and cause a fire.
- Extension cords are not intended to be used as permanent wiring. Long-term use causes accelerated deterioration and poses a hazard.
- Ensure temporary extension cords don't run under carpet or rugs, which can cause danger from overheating. Don't nail or staple cords in place, as this may damage the protective plastic jacket and expose you and your family to an electrical shock.
- Throw away damaged extension cords. Before you do, cut them in half to discourage "salvagers" from taking a hazard home with them.
- Never cut or grind the grounding prong off a plug to make it fit an outlet. You would defeat the purpose and integrity of the grounding safety system. Have a licensed electrical contractor install a new outlet to accommodate all the prongs of your cord's plugs.

For more information

On the Web: www.Lni.wa.gov/ElectricalBasics

Email: ElectricalProgram@Lni.wa.gov

Telephone: 360-902-5249

L&I Offices: www.Lni.wa.gov/Offices

Electronic equipment

- A surge protector outlet protects only the item plugged into it. It does not protect the circuit into which it is connected. Most surge protectors should be replaced in the event of a large power surge.
- Consider purchasing surge suppressors with cable and phone jacks to provide protection to your phone, fax, computer modem and television.
- Heavy reliance on power strips or extension cords indicates you have too few outlets for your needs. Have a licensed electrical contractor install additional outlets where you need them. Insist on an electrical permit and inspection.



Kitchens

- Receptacles mounted face up on a counter top are dangerous and illegal. These receptacles may contain moisture from cleaning or fluids accidentally spilled on the counter — a real danger that could cause an accidental shock.
- Make certain appliances such as a water heater, washer or dryer have decals stating they have been tested by UL, ETL, or CSA for electrical safety.
- Small appliances that are turned off can still shock if they fall into water while plugged in. Unplug the appliance or turn off power to that circuit before reaching into the sink or tub to retrieve it.
- When using a 3-to-2-hole plug adapter, make certain you screw the metal “tab” or ground wire on the adapter into the outlet’s cover screw.
- Don’t stretch cords across islands or let them dangle over counter edges where small children can pull the appliance down on themselves.
- Check outlets and switch plates to make sure they are not hot to the touch or discolored — indications of dangerous heat build-up.

Garage

- Always plug outdoor power tools and extension cords into GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupter) outlets. These outlets with special ground fault protection are required in the garage and outdoors of newer homes and will “trip” and break the circuit before a dangerous current level reaches the user.
- Ensure your natural gas hot water tank is located on a stand or platform at least 18" off the floor and is earthquake strapped. Gasoline or propane fumes can pool in the airspace nearest the floor and could ignite from a flame or spark.
- Remove and safely dispose of exhausted batteries. Loose batteries in a pocket with keys or coins can become short-circuited, possibly resulting in an explosion.

Outdoors

- Use an “outdoor approved” extension cord and match power needs (amperage) of electrical products with amperage rating of extension cords as shown on affixed labels. Also match the proper wire gauge (typically 12 or 14 AWG for power tools).
- Use an appropriate length extension cord for yard work. Do not “string together” multiple extensions cords. The extra internal electrical friction can cause a fire hazard.

If your outdoor wall outlet has room for only two prongs, hire an electrical contractor to replace it with a new GFCI-protected three-hole grounding receptacle with a cover that offers weather protection while a plug is inserted into the receptacle.

If an electrical product falls into the water, don’t retrieve it until you shut off the circuit breaker.

Electrical permits and inspections protect YOU

Electrical permits and inspections protect your safety and the value of your property. When you sell your home, Washington State law requires you to give the buyer a seller’s disclosure statement. This statement will ask you about property improvements and permits. You assume liability for what you disclose or fail to disclose on the statement.

For the buyer to obtain a mortgage you may have to deliver proof of inspection for new or remodel electrical work. Illegal electrical work or electrical work that hasn’t been inspected can void your homeowner’s insurance policy. Make certain your electrical contractor takes care of permits and correction notices before you make the final payment.

Before you pay to have electrical work done:

- Visit the www.Lni.wa.gov to verify your electrical contractor's status and for more information on electrical licensing, bond and insurance requirements.
- Ask to see your electrician's certificate of competency card before work starts.
- Confirm that a certified electrician is supervising any electrical trainees on your job.

Certificate — Individual



An electrician must have this certificate of competency card.

Certificate — Electrical Contractor



An electrical contractor must have this license.

Upon request, foreign language support and formats for persons with disabilities are available. Call 1-800-547-8367. TDD users, call 711. L&I is an equal opportunity employer.