

## Use of Extension Cords

### *When and How you may use an extension cord*

Extension cords tend to be a major repeat violation inspectors find for many occupancies and understandably so. Extension cords are a quick and easy way to get power from one place to another when you re-arrange an office, or add new equipment. Their flexibility allows them to travel pretty much anywhere, along a wall, under a desk, through a wall and many other places. The problem with extension cords, despite their flexibility, is that they simply are not manufactured or intended for many of the uses inspectors see them used for.

Extension cords are not intended for long term or permanent usage. They are manufactured for purpose of meeting temporary energy needs. In buildings and businesses, temporary energy needs refers to times when construction, remodel, cleaning and other like situations occur. Using an extension cord to permanently power an area is not acceptable by National Fire Protection Agency Standards, regardless of the gauge cord being used, or the small wattage of an appliance to which an extension cord is supplying power. It's important to remember that the nature of the extension cord, bending and moving all the time, may cause internal damage to the cord over time, which is why the danger tags affixed to cords when purchased clearly mark a need to thoroughly and carefully inspect the cords before use for any signs of wear. Many cords also put warning on their cords that the cord is intended for temporary use only.



In some instances, a power strip may be an acceptable alternative to an extension cord but keep in mind, a power strip is not intended or encouraged to replace permanent wiring. Although acceptable in some cases, it is highly advisable that if there is a need for power in a particular area, a permanent electrical installation be installed as it is the correct way to provide your power needs. Information on power strips can be found in another inspection post under the inspections tab of the fire departments web site (<http://fdmh.org>).

Extension cords that are used for purposes of remodel, construction, cleaning or other similar situations are expected to be used following the warnings on the tags affixed to the cord at time of purchase. These include warnings that the cords should be used in accordance with the indoor/outdoor use for which they were built, that cords should not have any outward signs of damage and that the wattage of the appliance being powered should not be larger than the wattage the cord is rated to handle. Cords may not be used through doorways, walls or ceilings. Extension cords may not be plugged into one another for distance purposes. Cords must be uncoiled and may not be wrapped around objects to avoid overheating. Cords may not be covered (with rugs or blankets for example) and they must not be subject to damage by being dragged, walked on, or having objects dragged over them.

For more information, review the package extension cords are purchased in. Ample paperwork providing correct and incorrect usage should be included with your extension cord to inform you how to properly use the cord. If you still have questions about extension cords, the fire prevention division of Mount Horeb Fire Department can be contacted during normal business hours to field your questions. A fire prevention division fire inspector may be contacted at 608 437 5571.