



WORKING WITH EXTENSION CORDS SAFELY

Extension cords are commonly used on site and are often treated as harmless. Because they are used every day, the risks they present are frequently overlooked. Damaged cords, poor routing, overloading, and improper use can lead to electric shock, burns, fires, and trip hazards. This toolbox talk focuses on how to work safely with extension cords and why they must be treated as electrical equipment, not convenience items.

Before Electrical Incidents Occur

Electrical incidents involving extension cords often happen because the condition of the cord or how it is being used is not properly considered before work starts.

Some key points every worker should be aware of:

- Extension cords are not designed for permanent use.
- Damaged insulation can expose live wires.
- Wet or damp conditions increase the risk of electric shock.
- Cords can overheat if overloaded or coiled while in use.
- Poorly routed cords create trip hazards and can be damaged by vehicles.
- Incorrect plugs or joints increase the risk of arcing and fire.
- Electrical faults are often invisible until something goes wrong.

Common Unsafe Practices

Many unsafe practices develop over time because they seem to work without immediate consequences.

Examples of unsafe extension cord use:

- Using damaged or repaired cords.
- Running cords through doorways, windows, or sharp edges.
- Routing cords across walkways without protection.
- Connecting multiple extension cords together.
- Using indoor cords for outdoor work.
- Leaving cords exposed to water, oil, or chemicals.
- Using extension cords to power high-load equipment.
- Leaving cords connected when not in use.

These practices increase the likelihood of shock, fire, or injury.

Safe Use of Extension Cords

Working safely with extension cords requires simple but consistent actions.

Safe practices include:

- Inspect cords before use for cuts, cracks, or exposed wires.
- Use the correct type of extension cord for the environment.
- Keep cords off walkways or protect them where crossing is unavoidable.
- Fully unwind cords during use to prevent overheating.
- Ensure plugs and sockets fit securely.
- Disconnect cords by pulling the plug, not the cable.
- Remove damaged cords from service immediately.
- Switch off and unplug cords when work is complete.

Your Responsibility on Site

Electrical safety is everyone's responsibility. Extension cords must never be treated as temporary fixes or shortcuts. One damaged cord or poor connection can cause injury not only to the user but to anyone nearby.

Summary

Extension cords are useful but potentially dangerous when used incorrectly. Electrical incidents can happen without warning and often result in serious injury or fire. Inspecting cords, using them correctly, and removing damaged cords from service are simple actions that prevent major incidents. Treat extension cords as electrical equipment and use them with care at all times.

Discussion Points

1. What unsafe extension cord practices have you seen on site?
2. Where are extension cords most likely to be damaged in our work areas?
3. What should you do if you find a damaged extension cord?

