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Electricity Safety

By Patti Hutchison

Electricity. You can't see it. But you use it every day. It keeps your food cold. It runs your TV, your hairdryer, and your video games. Electricity can be very helpful. But it can also be very dangerous.

Electric wires run all through your house. They are also found outside. Hundreds of people are killed each year because of electrical accidents. Thousands more are injured. If people would follow some basic safety rules when dealing with electricity, these accidents could be prevented.

When you deal with electricity, you must handle cords, switches, and outlets. Cords plug into the outlets to allow the electricity to flow through them. Switches start and stop this flow.

Never poke objects into an electrical outlet. This includes your fingers! Don't insert screwdrivers or any other metal objects. Make sure you have outlet covers on all your outlets. Put plastic inserts in them to keep children's fingers out. Teach children about the dangers of putting things into electric outlets.

Almost every electrical appliance has a cord. Most cords today have three prongs. The third prong is called a ground. This is a safety device. Never bend or remove the third prong from a plug. Don't touch cords that are damaged, especially if there are bare copper wires showing.

Have you ever used an extension cord? You plug an appliance into one end and plug the extension cord into the outlet. This allows you to use something farther away from the outlet than the regular cord can reach. Many people use extension cords. But some don't use them safely.

Don't overload outlets with cords. Never run an extension cord under a rug. Always use a heavy duty cord for a power tool or other heavy duty appliance. Extension cords should be used only for a short amount of time. Then the appliance should be unplugged. The extension cord should be put away properly until it is needed again.

A very important safety rule to remember is that electricity and water DO NOT mix! Always keep plugs away from puddles or other sources of water. Don't use appliances around water. Never use hair dryers, curling irons, radios, or other electric appliances near bathtubs or sinks. Always dry your hands before turning on a switch or plugging something in. If you need to clean an appliance, unplug it before using any water or cleaning solution on it. Make sure it is completely dry before plugging it back in.

Appliances can be dangerous. Never poke something into an appliance that is plugged in. This includes your toaster. Many people are injured by poking their finger or a knife into the toaster to get out toast that is stuck. Always unplug the appliance before doing any kind of work on it.

Power lines outside are very high voltage. Never climb trees near power lines. Touching them can be fatal. If a power line is sparking and touching the ground, don't go near it. Call 911 immediately.

What should you do if there is an electrical emergency? Sometimes electricity can cause a fire. Never put water on an electrical fire. If you know how, use a multi-purpose fire extinguisher. Get help immediately.

If you see someone being shocked, don't touch them. The electricity can run through you and shock you, too. If this happens inside your house, find the electrical box and turn off the main power switch. Call 911 and get help right away.

We often take electricity for granted. We are used to the convenience of it. But electricity is something that needs to be respected. Using common sense and following basic safety rules can prevent injury or death.

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Questions

_____ 1. It is safe to put things in an outlet as long as they are not made of metal.

A. true
B. false

_____ 2. The ground prong on a cord is:

A. a safety device
B. not necessary

_____ 3. You should always run extension cords under a rug so that no one trips over them.

A. true
B. false

4. You are washing dishes. You decide to turn on the light over the sink so you can see better. What should you do first?

5. What should you use to put out an electrical fire?

There are crumbs stuck in the bottom of your toaster. You need to clean it. Write a paragraph explaining the safe way to do this.

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You walk into the kitchen and find someone being shocked. What should you do? Write a paragraph explaining the steps you should take to help.