

'Tis the season for heightened risks of electrical hazards

With the holiday season underway, people are plugging in lights, ornaments and extra holiday décor for all to enjoy. With this comes the extra risk of electrical fires. A few reminders when it comes to setting up and enjoying lights, displays and music safely.

With the colder weather and extra lights of the holiday season, there are a lot of extension cords put being put to good use these days. Are you ensuring the cords you are using are safe? Are you using them safely?

When you are conducting pre-inspections of extension cords, outlets and power cords, you will take a look for the following:

- Is there any tape on cords?
- Are there any areas of cords that are frayed?
- Are there any cuts in the cord that are showing wire?
- Is the power bar overloaded/ full?
- Are there power bars plugged into power bars?
- Are there any extension cords used as permanent sources of power?
- What does the area around the electrical panel(s) look like? Is the area(s) free from obstruction
- What conditions are the receptacles in? Is there any sign of wear or burns?

Wherever you are plugging things in, the area should be clear in case of fire. Cords should be in good condition without any sign of wear. The same goes for power bars. Power bars should be directly plugged into a wall outlet and not using extension cords to further the length to the outlet. Outdoor cords can be used indoors but you should never use an indoor extension cord for outdoor tasks.

The way to differentiate the two is how it is marked, and how many prongs it has. On the extension cord packaging or on the cord itself, the letter "W" indicates that the cord is designed



for use outside. Outdoor extension cords have a heavy-duty appearance and tend to have tough, bright orange covers that are made from rubber, vinyl or plastic.

It's also good to know about cord gauge. The gauge of an extension cord is simply the size or diameter of the conducting wires on the interior. Where indoor extension cords seldom reach lengths of

over 25 feet, outdoor extension cords reach lengths up to 150 feet or above. The larger the conducting wire, the more current is permitted to flow through the extension cord. Outdoor extension cords have a higher amperage than indoor extension cords. Amp ratings are labeled on the product package and are determined by the wire diameter and length.

It is also common for outdoor extension cords to have a three-pronged plug, unlike indoor extension cords that typically feature two prongs. The third prong on the plug of the extension cord serves as a grounding wire that minimizes the risk of electrical shock or fire. A three-pronged plug is meant to fit an outlet that is designed with a ground slot.

If using an extension cord to plug in your truck during the cold winter months, ensure that you are using a heavy-duty, outdoor cord with a three pronged plug.

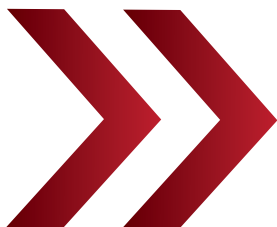
A great buying tip for year-round extension cords is to choose brightly colored types to help you locate them, to prevent tripping, and to help notify people who may be working in your yard or mowing that extension cords are present.

Storing extension cords is an important role is their safety. When you are finished with a cord, unplug and carefully roll it back up as it was when you opened the package. Then, hang it somewhere safe (and away from the elements if it is an outdoor type) until you need it again.

Do you need more information? RPM can help!

We now offer Hazard Identification and Risk Control as a self-led online course, as well as Incident Reporting & Investigation Techniques. Safety for Supervisors will also be available as a self-led online course soon. These courses are also available as custom courses.

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Phone: 204-632-6600 | Email: info@rpmsafety.ca | Web: www.rpmsafety.ca

Address: 25 Bunting Street Winnipeg, MB R2X 2P5