If you are like most people, you often find yourself using an extension cord, either at home or at work. While extension cords look harmless, they can be dangerous. Used properly, extension cords make our jobs a lot easier. Used incorrectly, however, they can become dangerous and a threat to the safety of both the user and anyone in the vicinity.

Potential Hazards of Extension Cord Use

The most obvious hazard that exists with improper extension cord use is the potential for electrical shock. The danger of electrical shock can be minimized by only using cords that carry the approval of the Underwriter’s Laboratory. This shows that the cord meets generally recognized safety standards. Also, make sure the cord you are using is large enough to carry the electrical load that you will be imposing on it. The label on the cord will tell you how much it can handle. If the cord is hot to the touch, it is too small for what you are trying to do.

To Prevent Cord Damage or Personal Injury

To prevent cord damage or personal injury: It is also important that the cord be used properly.

✓ Coil the cord in large loops.
✓ Don’t bend the cord unnecessarily, or subject it to strain.
✓ Don’t run the cord under a rug. While this may prevent a tripping hazard, it makes it very easy to walk over. The broken insulation or wiring will not be seen readily, and the end result could be a fire.
✓ Use a properly grounded plug.
✓ Never connect two small extension cords. Use one long cord instead.

Repair of Extension Cords

If the cord should become damaged, resist the temptation to wrap it with tape and continue to use it. Damaged extension cords should either be discarded or repaired only by a qualified person.

If Extension Cords Are Used Frequently

If you find it necessary to use an extension cord in the same area frequently, a better option would be to have permanent wiring installed. While this may be expensive initially, it will give you peace of mind and makes good sense from a safety standpoint.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the use of extension cords, please call the Department of Environmental Health and Safety at 8-8182.