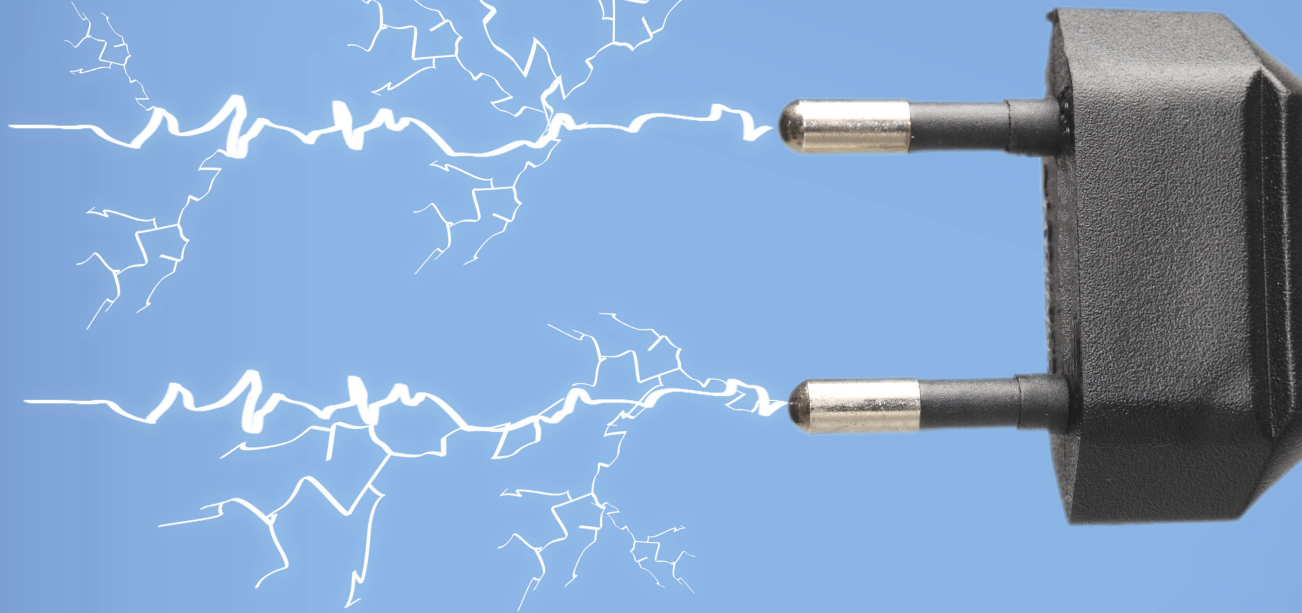


How to Prevent or Handle Electrical Fires



Electrical fires can cause a lot of damage to your home, so preventing a fire from starting in the first place is a really smart idea. Fortunately, prevention is not all that hard. The following suggestions will help:

- Unplug appliances when you are not using them, and store the cords so that children and pets won't get to them. (This is much easier to do if you make sure that you can get to all plugs without any problem.) Even if you decide to leave something plugged in most of the time, at least unplug it when you go on vacation or when there is a big storm. Be sure to unplug appliances by pulling on the plug in the outlet. Don't ever tug on the cord.
- Unfortunately, water is a great conductor for electrical current. Keep your appliances away from water sources such as faucets, sinks, bathtubs, and showers so that any electricity you use is well away from the water. Also, make sure you maintain appliances correctly; failing to do so can cause sparks and shorts.
- Make sure that you provide plenty of space around appliances such as computers and televisions that tend to generate heat. This means not putting a television on a crowded shelf; it also means keeping it free of any decorations or flammable knickknacks, and making sure it's not too close to any window coverings. A few inches of space are probably enough, but you basically want to make sure that air can circulate freely to cool things off. Also, don't put flammable items like clothing, books, or other paper products close to heating vents or radiators.
- Check electrical cords on a regular basis. You want to spot cracks, any fraying, loose wires, and evidence of any biting or chewing from animals. Pets can be bad for chewing; rats can bite. Either way, you don't want to let any damage done go undetected, and if you have a problem with mice or rats, you should probably deal with that sooner than later.
- Keep rugs under cords, not over them. The bump in the rug can cause people to trip, and the cords can overheat if a rug prevents them from being able to cool down. Don't use extension cords unless necessary, and then make sure you pick one with appropriate specifications and the correct length for your purpose.
- Replace outlets when they no longer hold a plug firmly. If you have pets or children, then use cover plates or childproof caps. Talk to your children and teach them that they should not play with electricity.
- If your home is older than about 20 years, you might need to install ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in any part of your home where water and electricity might come into contact with each



other: your kitchen, basement, any bathrooms, a laundry room, and (if you have one) your pool are all good places to start.

- Look at any light fixtures and make sure you are using the correct amount of wattage for the fixture. If the fixture can't handle the amount of watts, then it can overheat. Turn off lights before you change bulbs; if there is a plug, then you should unplug it, too. Screw the new bulb in so that it is tight. Loose bulbs can cause sparks or short circuits.
- Think about switching to low-energy-consuming bulbs, like fluorescent light bulbs. Using less energy is good when it comes to preventing fires, and it also helps you keep the cost of buying electricity down.

If you do have an electrical fire, and it is large, your home will need to be evacuated — fast. If the electrical fire is still small, here's the procedure:

- Call for help from the fire department before you do anything else. If you aren't successful in putting out the fire, you want help to be on the way.
- Do not ever put water on electrical fires. You will make things worse, because water conducts electricity and also because you can cause additional sparks when the water and electricity come in contact with each other. You might end up electrocuting yourself or someone else and making the

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fire bigger at the same time.

- Unplug the cord, if you can do that safely, or turn off the circuit breaker for the entire house so that electricity is not flowing to the appliance anymore. A small fire can often be put out just by getting rid of the electrical current.
- Put out any remaining fire with a class C fire extinguisher or (if you don't have one) some baking soda, sand, or a safety blanket. The idea is to smother the flames. Keep in mind that as long as electrical current is still present, there's some risk to you of electrical shock.

You might have to make a judgment call about turning off the circuit breaker first or putting out the fire first, but remember that electrical current is dangerous separate of the fire. Either way, you will need to act fast.

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