



Firefactsheet

Electrical Safety Advice

Electricity is a major cause of accidental fires in UK homes – over 20,000 each year.

Causes of electrical fires

Nine out of 10 (89%) electrical fires are caused by electrical products. A relatively small percentage (11%) are caused by faults in installations* or by people not using installations properly.

Top five products that cause the most electrical fires in UK homes are:

- Electric cooking appliances (such as cookers and microwaves but not deep fat fryers)
- Laundry appliances (washing machines and tumble dryers)
- Electrical lighting
- Portable heaters
- TVs

In total, these five types of product cause almost 12,000 fires each year and almost 3,000 injuries.



Keeping you safe

The Electrical Safety Council recommends that you get the following devices installed for your safety.

Residual Current Device



A Residual Current Device (RCD) is a life-saving device which is designed to prevent you from getting a fatal electric shock if you touch something live, such as a bare wire. It provides a level of protection that ordinary fuses or circuit-breakers cannot provide.

Like a smoke detector, an RCD installed in your fusebox could one day save your life.

Smoke Alarms

If a fire starts in your home, a smoke alarm will provide an early warning signal giving you valuable time to escape. Modern alarms are neat and tidy, and cost under £10.

*an electrical installation is the wiring in a home including the electrical intake, fusebox and the lighting and power circuits.

Fire facts

Every year electrical fires cause

- 50 deaths*
- 3,000 injuries*
- Over £100 million in damage to private property
- Faulty appliances alone cause £41.6 million of damage per year, with electric cookers (£24m) and lighting (£13m) among the largest contributors.

* Department for Communities and Local Government, Fire Statistics 2008



How to prevent a fire in your home

Cooking appliances

Government statistics show that the largest number of accidental reported fires caused by electricity in the home is due to people misusing electrical cooking appliances, including microwaves. So you need to take special care when using your electrical appliances in your kitchen.

You must:

- not let leads from other appliances like kettles or toasters trail across the cooker;
- never dry towels on, or near, the cooker;
- not let fat and grease build up on or in the cooker, especially in the grill pan where it can easily catch fire; and
- make sure that you turn the cooker off when you have finished using it.

Combustible materials

Don't store combustible materials (clothes, papers, cleaning materials etc.) close to your service head (cut-out fuse), electricity meter or fusebox, particularly where these are under the stairs (a means of escape in an emergency). There have been a number of serious fires in homes where a fault in such electrical equipment, the effects of which would otherwise have been contained, has set light to adjacent stored materials. By having the electrics in your home checked regularly and by taking some simple precautions with your electrical appliances, you can reduce the risk of fire.

Do:

- **Ensure your electrical installation is checked by a registered electrician*, specifically:**

Homeowners: should have this done at least every 10 years and when you move home. The easiest way to find out when the last check (known as a periodic inspection or condition report) was carried out and the next one is due is by locating the label fixed on or near your fusebox (also known as a consumer unit).

Tenants: should ask your landlord for a copy of the certificate or report confirming that the electrical installation meets the UK national standard BS 7671 (Requirements for Electrical Installations) and is safe to use. The electrical installation and any appliances provided by the landlord are the landlord's responsibility.

- **check your sockets regularly** – if you see burn marks or they feel hot, get a registered electrician to check if they need repairing or replacing.
- **have additional sockets installed** if existing sockets and/or adaptors are overloaded.

- **turn off any electrical appliances that you are not using**, particularly at night, when a fire can quickly spread unnoticed and cause more danger and damage.
- **check flexible cables to appliances before plugging them in to use.** Check for damage, and wear and tear, and that the plug is fastened securely to the cable. Don't use the appliance unless it and its cable are in good condition.
- **be careful when using hand-held electrical appliances and make sure that you switch them off and unplug them when you have finished.** This is particularly important with items that get very hot in normal use, such as hair dryers and curling tongs which, if you leave them on, can easily cause any combustible material that they are in contact with to catch fire.
- **call the Fire and Rescue Service immediately if you smell burning that cannot be explained.** They will have equipment such as thermal imaging cameras which will accurately detect objects that are overheating.

Don't:

- overload electrical adaptors by plugging too many appliances in to one socket especially appliances with a high electrical current rating such as kettles, irons and heaters.



- put electric heaters near curtains or furniture, or dry clothes on them.
- cover the air vents on storage heaters or fan heaters.
- trail flexible cables under carpets or rugs.
- use a bulb with a higher wattage than the wattage printed on the light fitting or lamp shade you are using.

*a registered electrician is an electrician who is registered with a government-authorized scheme.

What to do if there is a fire

The Department of Communities and Local Government recommends the following:

- **Keep calm and act quickly**, get everyone out as soon as possible.
- **Don't waste time** investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- **If there's smoke**, keep low where the air is clearer.
- **Before you open a door** check if it's warm. If it is, don't open it – fire is on the other side.
- **Call 999 as soon as you're clear of the building.** 999 calls are free.

Many local Fire and Rescue Services will come to your home and carry out a Home Fire Risk Check to help keep you and your family safe. For more information contact your local Fire and Rescue Service on their non-emergency contact number (not 999).



For further information on preventing fires and keeping you and your family safe visit www.esc.org.uk

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The Electrical Safety Council is a UK charity committed to reducing deaths and injuries caused by electrical accidents at home and at work.

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