

# winter

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY



### FACTS AND STATISTICS

More than 3,000 electrical fires are caused by extension cords each year, resulting in 50 deaths and 270 injuries.

Large appliances cause nearly 20 percent of consumer-product electrocutions annually.

U.S. Customs confiscates more than \$3 million in consumer electrical products each year, and explains that products with counterfeit certification marks, including CSA, UL and ETL, have not been tested for shock and fire hazards.



[www.electrical-safety.org](http://www.electrical-safety.org)

## OVERVIEW

Statistics show that sales of electrical products increase during the winter months.

The introduction of counterfeit electrical products into the marketplace is on the rise. Counterfeit electrical products, which have not met testing and safety standards, can cause death, injury and property damage. To avoid electrical hazards caused by counterfeit electrical products, purchase products from reputable distributors and retailers, and check certification marks, such as CSA, UL or ETL.

## PORTABLE HEATER SAFETY

ESFI offers the following safety tips and precautions regarding space heaters, baseboard, and in-wall heaters as you head into cooler weather:

- ◆ Keep all furniture, draperies, and other household objects at least three feet from the in-wall fan heaters and 12 inches from baseboard heaters.
- ◆ Keep portable space heaters at least three feet away from all flammable materials, such as furniture and draperies.
- ◆ Plug portable space heaters directly into the outlet; do not use an extension cord.
- ◆ If an in-wall or baseboard heater is shut off at the circuit breaker, be sure to lock or tag the circuit breaker to prevent someone from inadvertently turning it back on.
- ◆ Some portable space heaters, electric in-wall fan heaters and baseboard heaters have been subject to product recalls. Check your brand and model number and visit [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) for possible information about your heater.

## FOR HAPPY HOLIDAYS, FOLLOW THESE ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) reminds those at home and in the workplace to keep electrical safety in mind when decorating for the holiday season:

- ◆ Before decorating, read and follow the manufacturers' instructions concerning installation and maintenance of all decorative electrical products.
- ◆ Indoors and out, use lights and other electrical decorations certified by a recognized independent testing laboratory such as CSA, UL, or ETL.

- ◆ Outdoors, use lights and other electrical decorations certified for outdoor use.
- ◆ Carefully inspect each decoration before plugging into an outlet. Cracked, frayed, loose or bare wires, and loose connections may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items.
- ◆ Always unplug an electrical decoration before replacing light bulbs or fuses, or before leaving the house or going to bed.
- ◆ Don't mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's insulation. Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords.
- ◆ Don't overload extension cords – they can overheat and start a fire.
- ◆ Keep all outdoor extension cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water and well-protected from weather.
- ◆ Use caution when decorating near power lines. Stay at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines.
- ◆ Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- ◆ Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable GFCIs can be purchased wherever electrical supplies are sold.

## COUNTERFEIT ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS POSE MAJOR SAFETY HAZARDS

Trademark counterfeiting has reached the electrical sector. Counterfeit electrical products can pose significant safety hazards and left undetected, can cause deaths, injuries and substantial property loss in the home and the workplace, according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI).

The electrical products targeted by counterfeiters are to be used by both consumers and industry. The list includes control relays for industrial equipment, lamps, electronic lamp ballasts, dry cell batteries, lithium ion batteries, smoke detectors, fuses, circuit breakers, electrical receptacles, ground fault circuit interrupters, conduit fittings, power strips and surge suppressors, electrical cordsets (extension cords), power cords, telecommunications cable, and electrical connectors.

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While some counterfeit products appear as excellent copies of the genuine product, detection based on appearance can be difficult, and may only be determined by opening suspicious products and performing tests. Counterfeit electrical products may contain inferior materials, with little or no concern for consumer and workplace safety.

Counterfeit electrical products can overheat or cause short circuits and lead to fire, shock or explosion. For example, some counterfeit dry cell batteries use designs that fail to prevent explosion in electronic products when mistakenly installed backwards. Counterfeit electrical cord sets may contain thinner wire gauges than normally required, posing fire hazards.

Often, counterfeiters use inferior materials and avoid key manufacturing steps to reduce the cost of their products, allowing them to be sold at prices no genuine brand manufacturer can match. For the unsuspecting consumer of this product, the risk of fire causing injury to person or property is substantially enhanced.

The following tips could help avoid potentially dangerous counterfeit electrical products:

- ◆ Use established vendors who purchase their goods from legitimate distributors and genuine manufacturers. Fly-by-night vendors may not be willing to grant refunds for electrical products that do not perform as they should.
  - ◆ Check the warning label. It should be free of grammatical errors and not conflict with information elsewhere on the package.
  - ◆ Look for the name and contact information of the manufacturer. If this information is missing, considering purchasing electrical products elsewhere.
  - ◆ Avoid no-name products.
- ◆ Look for the CSA, UL or ETL-SEMCO Certification marks. If you have concerns about the marks, contact the certifier.
  - ◆ Buyers should beware of bargains that seem too good to be true. Products may be cheap because they are counterfeit or defective.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND LINKS

For more on lightning safety, visit the Lightning Protection Institute (LPI) at [www.lightning.org](http://www.lightning.org). For more on work place safety, visit the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). For consumer safety, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).