

Overheating power strips

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Avoid overheating power strips. Check your power strip to be sure that devices are plugged into it correctly.

During lunch on Tuesday, Sept. 22, a multioutlet power strip in the cafeteria of another DOE laboratory burst into flames. This power strip (in the picture above) was being used improperly to supply an ice cream chest freezer in addition to cash register equipment. Power strips damaged by overloads have also been found at Fermilab.

To help avoid this type of incident, the Electrical Safety Subcommittee reminds everyone to ensure that:

- High-power loads, such as space heaters and common kitchen appliances, are connected directly to permanent receptacles or a single appliance cord.
- The total current of the plugged-in devices adds up to less than the current rating of the strip.

- Power strips or extension cords are never plugged into each other (daisy-chained) or run beneath rugs or carpets.
- Power strips can be unplugged and removed without using tools or moving heavy furniture.
- Power strips have been evaluated for quality construction. The Fermilab Stockroom carries such power strips. Less expensive ones can be found, but they are usually cheaply made and will pose a greater fire hazard.
- Power strips that are hot to the touch or show signs of discoloration or melting are unplugged and removed from service.

A power strip should be replaced if:

- The NRTL seal, such as UL, ETL or TUV, is missing.
- The light is not illuminated when on (if so equipped).
- One or more receptacles no longer firmly hold plugs in place.
- The power strip is damaged or shows age-related deterioration.
- It appears to be a suspect or counterfeit item.

A surge-protected power strip to protect computer equipment or sensitive instruments is also available through the Stockroom.

Arrange your workspace to minimize power strip and extension cord use, or talk to your supervisor about installing additional permanent outlets where needed. Check all electrical equipment, including power strips, for an NRTL label signifying that it has been tested by a qualified independent laboratory. Read all manufacturers' instructions to understand the purposes for which it can and cannot be used. If you are unsure about your power strip, surge protector or outlet strip, contact your supervisor, electrical coordinator or division safety officer.

Tagged: safety



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