Spot The Safety Violation: Don’t Be Shocked!

This use of extension and electrical cords doesn’t seem very safe, does it’

Extension cords are commonly used in many workplaces. But if they’re not used properly, they can pose various hazards. So it’s important that your workers know how to use them safely.

This picture from eLCOSH shows a tangled mess of extension and other electrical cords, which pose a trip-and-fall hazard. For example, in Manitoba, a worker broke his left wrist after tripping over an extension cord and falling.

It also doesn’t help that the wet conditions surrounding the cords increase the risk of electrical shocks. For example, in New Brunswick, a worker in a fish smoking plant was

electrocuted

when he touched a defective extension cord. The extension cord, which had exposed conductors, lay on the wet salty floor and was plugged into a portable hand lamp. The worker, whose clothing was soaked with salt water, touched the exposed conductors and was electrocuted.

Lastly, having this many cords connected in this manner could overload the circuit.

EXTENSION CORD DOS & DON'TS

Make sure that your safety training addresses electrical hazards. In addition, the Texas Department of Insurance Division of Workers' Compensation has compiled some useful dos and don'ts for safely working with extension cords:

13 DOS:

1. **Do** inspect an extension cord for physical damage before use. (Remember what happened to the worker in New Brunswick because of a damaged cord.)

2. **Do** check the wattage rating on the appliance or tool that the extension cord will be used with and don't use an extension cord that has a lower rating.

3. **Do** make sure all equipment and extension cords bear the mark of an independent testing laboratory such as UL (Underwriter's Laboratories).

4. **Do** make sure the plug on an extension cord is fully inserted in the outlet.

5. **Do** replace an outlet if a plug is too loose in it.

6. **Do** match up the plug and extension cord on a polarized cord (one hole on the plug is larger than the other).

7. **Do** keep extension cords away from water. Water or wet/moist

conditions heighten the risk of electrical shock. For example, after a flood, the risk of such shocks is a common and serious safety hazard.

8. **Do** use Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) protection when using extension cords in wet or damp environments.

9. **Do** pull on the plug'not the cord'when removing an extension cord from the outlet.

10. **Do** store extension cords indoors.

11. **Do** unplug extension cords when not in use.

12. **Do** keep slack in flexible extension cords to prevent tension on electrical terminals.

13. **Do** put safety covers on the unused receptacle outlets on extension cords.

14 DON'TS:

1. **Don't** use an extension cord marked for indoor use outdoors.

2. **Don't** plug one extension cord into another.

3. **Don't** overload cords with more than the proper electrical load.

4. **Don't** run extension cords through doorways or holes in ceilings, walls or floors.

5. **Don't** move, bend or modify any of the metal parts of the extension cord plug.

6. **Don't** plug a three-prong into a two-hole extension cord.

7. **Don't** force a plug into an outlet.

8. **Don't** use an extension cord when it's wet.

9. **Don't** overheat an extension cord.

10. **Don’t** cover an extension cord with anything.

11. **Don’t** drive over, stand or place anything on top of an extension cord.

12. **Don’t** drag an extension cord.

13. **Don’t** attach extension cords to the wall with nails or staples.

14. **Don’t** run extension cords under rugs or carpets, or in high traffic areas.