Electrical Safety Tips – Working from Home

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Introduction

A large number of employees now work from home on a regular basis as part of an agile or hybrid working arrangement.

For most employees, working from home will mean an increased use of electrical devices within the home. The consumer charity, *Electrical Safety First,* has found many people are overloading sockets, 'daisy-chaining' extension leads and charging devices on beds. Below are several tips to help keep you electrically safe when you work from home.

Avoid overloading extension leads

If the cable from your work computer / laptop is too short to reach the nearest available socket, you are probably using an extension lead. But just because an extension lead has space to plug in four or more appliances, this does not mean it is always safe to do so.

Check the wattage rating of the extension lead before plugging appliances in to avoid overloading. It is extremely important to be careful that the combined power demand of the devices does not exceed the lead's wattage rating. If it did, it could lead to the plug in the wall overheating, causing a fire. The maximum rating of any extension lead for normal domestic use is 13 amps, but some are rated at only 10 amps or less. The rating should be clearly marked on the underside of the extension lead. Extension leads should meet the requirements of BS5733 and parts of BS1362-2.

Don't overload your sockets

The typical home office set-up of a laptop and docking station should be fine for an extension lead. There also should not be any problem adding a phone charger or desk lamp. But high wattage appliances, like a hair dryer or space heater, should never be plugged into the same extension lead. You can use the overload calculator on the link below to check that you are not plugging in too many appliances at once.
Overloading Sockets | Electrical Safety First

Don't 'daisy-chain' extension leads

'Daisy chaining' involves plugging one extension lead into another to reach further and is strongly advised against in all circumstances. If your cable doesn't reach, consider moving your workstation closer to the socket or get a longer lead and only use one extension lead per socket.

It is recommended to use a multi-way extension lead instead of a block adaptor. Some block adaptors do not have a fuse, which increases the risk of overloading and fire.

Consider having extra sockets installed if you regularly rely on extension leads and working from home is your new normal. Always use a registered / qualified electrician to carry out the electrical work. Be aware of cables and run them so they are not a trip hazard.

Charge your devices safely

Laptops and mobiles are increasingly in use for work purposes. You should always charge devices on a hard, flat surface. Never charge them on a bed or other flammable surface. Electrical products can overheat and cause a fire.

Unplug chargers when the battery is fully charged. Do not leave devices continuously charging or you could damage the battery and the device could overheat with devastating results. It is best not to leave your phone plugged in overnight.

Check you are using the right charger

Phone and laptop chargers are among the biggest causes of house fires. Check you are using the chargers supplied with your mobile phones, tablets or laptop. If you need a replacement, you should contact your line manager and the ICT Support Desk. There are lots of fakes out there, **so don't buy a cheap alternative** because you think it may be easier than ordering a new one through ICT, you would be leaving your home and family open to fire risks.

Keep your workstation tidy

It is likely you are working in a smaller, more cramped space than you would be if you were working in the office. Try to keep your work area tidy. Be careful with any drinks that you bring to your desk. Electricity and liquid don't mix. When the two do meet, fluids can destroy electronic circuits and you could receive a serious electric shock.

If you do spill any liquid over your laptop, the quicker you can turn off the device, the better. Make sure your hands are dry and, if safe to do so, switch off the appliance using the switch on the wall socket or via your consumer unit. Report the incident to your line manager and ICT. Do not use the device until it has been checked by ICT.

Work Equipment

The employer has a duty to ensure that work equipment is safe for its intended use and maintained in a safe condition. This duty extends to all work equipment, including laptops, tablets, mobile tech and the associated mains charging equipment. It is therefore important that this mobile equipment is inspected by employees prior to use, and periodically through the life of the equipment, to ensure it remains in a safe condition.

Portable Appliance Testing (PAT)

Portable appliance testing (PAT) is the term used to describe the examination of electrical appliances and equipment to ensure they are safe to use. Most electrical safety defects can be found by visual examination, but some types of defect can only be found by testing.

PAT testing is carried out on an annual basis at each of the Councils fixed locations, to ensure the electrical integrity of portable appliances on site. When this takes place, employees should take the opportunity to bring in portable electrical work equipment, to ensure PAT testing is carried out on their equipment. Corporate Maintenance will inform relevant building managers when PAT testing is taking place at the main, fixed locations across the Authority.

PAT testing does not replace the need for regular visual inspections of devices as outlined below. Missing a PAT does not mean equipment must be taken out of use, as long as visual inspections are undertaken, and no issues are noted. If any damage or malfunction is noted, then devices must be taken out of use and reported to ICT.

The equipment to be PAT tested should include:

<table>
<tr>
<td>☑ Laptop cables and laptop chargers</td>
<td rowspan="2">☒ Larger items that are not often moved and are set up in a location such as monitors, printers and peripheral items.
These devices are rarely moved or disturbed and as such are low risk, there is a likelihood of causing damage by bringing such items to the office and as such it is recommended these are visually checked as described in this document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Mobile device chargers</td>
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<tr>
<td>☑ Any similar Council issued electrical devices or power leads</td>
<td rowspan="2">☒ Laptops, mobile phone chargers, torches and cameras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Portable electrical equipment that is used in a manner that requires regular handling, storing and transporting</td>
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<tr>
<td colspan="2">if any damage or malfunction is noted put out of use and report to your line manager or ICT.</td>
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Regular visual checks

It is important to check that leads, plugs, equipment and wall sockets are safe. Look regularly for any signs of wear and tear, including:

- Blackness or scorch marks around a plug or appliance
- A smell of hot plastic or burning near a socket or appliance
- Melted plastic on appliance casings or leads
- Smoke or sparks coming from a plug or appliance
- Damaged or frayed leads
- Insulation or bare wires showing on a plug or appliance
- Damaged casing on the appliance
- Any damage to the plug
- Fuses that blow or circuit breakers that operate for no obvious reason

If something looks damaged or dangerous, stop using it immediately and don't try to fix it yourself. If it is Council equipment, report the fault to your line manager and ICT.

Take a few minutes to make sure you are not overloading sockets, that you are using extension leads correctly, they do not present a trip hazard, and that charging devices are placed on hard, non-flammable surfaces. We all need to keep electrically safe whilst working from home.

Further Information

Further advice and guidance regarding working from home and the use of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) can be found at The RCT Source

Contact the Corporate Health & Safety Team at HealthandSafetyTeam@rctcbc.gov.uk

Contact ICT at Portal Default Home - ICT & Digital Services - Self Service (rctcbc.gov.uk)

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg
This document is available in Welsh