SKILLSIGNAL™
Construction Safety & Compliance

TOOLBOX TALK

Extension Cord Misuse: Five Habits That Get People Hurt

TOPIC NO.	DURATION	AUDIENCE
TBT 08	10 to 15 min	All Crew

OSHA REFERENCE 29 CFR 1910 Subpart S · 29 CFR 1926 Subpart K · Electrical Safety

PROJECT / JOBSITE	DATE	PRESENTED BY

01 THE HOOK

START HERE

Think about how much of your day depends on electricity. The drill, the saw, the vac, the lights, the chargers. The receptacle is never where you need it, so you grab the orange snake out of the gang box and run it where you need power. We do this every day without thinking. That's the problem. The extension cord is one of the most-used and most-abused tools on the jobsite, and the wrong habits with it cause fires, shocks, and trips that put guys in the hospital.

02 WHY EXTENSION CORDS GET DANGEROUS

An extension cord is **temporary power**. The whole design assumes you'll use it for a task and put it back. The minute we treat it like permanent wiring, run it through doorways, or push more current through it than it's rated for, we cross from "temporary fix" into "fire hazard." Below are the five habits that get crews hurt.

03 THE FIVE HAZARDS

HAZARD 1

OVERLOADING THE CORD

Every cord has an **amp rating** printed on the jacket or tag. Plug in equipment that draws more current than the cord is rated for and you'll cook the wire from the inside. The jacket gets warm, the insulation breaks down, and you've got a short or a fire. Check the cord's amp rating against the tool's rating *before* you plug in. If it's close, get a heavier cord.

HAZARD 2

USING A CORD AS PERMANENT WIRING

Extension cords are **temporary** power, generally meaning 30 days or less. If you see one strung through rafters, zip-tied to a wall, run through a chase-way, or feeding a piece of equipment for months, that's an OSHA violation and a real fire risk. Permanent power needs permanent wiring done by an electrician.

HAZARD 3

RUNNING CORDS THROUGH DOORS AND WINDOWS

A door slamming on a cord pinches the insulation. A window sash crushing it does the same. Move the cord back and forth a few hundred times and the jacket splits. Now the **conductors are exposed** and anyone who touches that spot becomes the path to ground. Route cords around openings, not through them. If you have to cross a doorway, use a cord protector and route it overhead.

HAZARD 4

INDOOR-RATED CORDS USED OUTDOORS

Indoor cords aren't built for cold, wet, or sun. The jacket cracks. Water gets in. The cord overheats and shorts. Outdoor-rated cords have a **"W" in the marking** on the tag (for example SJTW or SOOW). Check the tag. If it's indoor-only, it stays inside.

HAZARD 5

LEAVING A BAD CORD IN SERVICE

Cracked jacket. Exposed copper. Bent or missing ground pin. Burn marks on the plug. Any of those, and the cord is **out of service**. Tag it, unplug it, and turn it in. Don't "just use it for one more task." That one task is how guys get hurt.

04 PRE-USE CORD INSPECTION

Take 10 seconds before every use. Run your hand down the full length of the cord and check for these:

- ☐ Cuts, splits, or abrasions in the jacket exposing wire.
- ☐ Soft, melted, or burnt-feeling spots along the cord.
- ☐ Bent, missing, or broken ground pin on the plug.
- ☐ Loose, cracked, or burned plug or receptacle housing.
- ☐ Electrical tape "repairs" anywhere on the cord.
- ☐ Correct amp rating for the tool you're plugging in.
- ☐ "W" rating in the cord markings if you're using it outside.

⚠ NO FIELD REPAIRS

Wrapping a damaged cord in electrical tape is not a repair. It's a workaround that hides the problem until it kills somebody. If a cord needs repair, it goes to whoever is authorized to do it, never the user. If you don't know who that is on this crew, ask before you leave this huddle.

05 WHY IT MATTERS

[JOBSITE]

FOR THE CREW

Extension cord failures cause some of the most preventable jobsite fires. Ten seconds of inspection before each use prevents a shutdown, a citation, or a callout to the fire marshal.

[INDIVIDUAL]

FOR YOU

The shock from a damaged cord doesn't care that you're experienced. Damp gloves, wet boots, and a frayed jacket are all it takes. A bad cord is the cheapest way to get hurt on this site.

[HOME]

FOR LIFE OFF-SITE

Holiday lights, garage workshops, the pressure washer in the driveway. Same rules at home. Same five hazards. Same inspection. Don't train careful at work and careless at home.

06 TODAY'S DRILL

TODAY'S DRILL **WALK THE CORDS**

Before lunch today, walk your work area and put eyes on every extension cord in service. Plug-end to tool-end. Tag and pull anything that fails the inspection. If you find a cord being used as permanent wiring, flag it for the supervisor. The site is safer in 10 minutes than it was when we started this huddle.

07 CREW DISCUSSION

Take 2 minutes. Pick one.

1. Has anyone here ever found a cord they thought was fine, but it failed under load? What were the warning signs you missed?
2. What's the longest you've seen an "temporary" extension cord stay in place on a jobsite? What should have replaced it?
3. On this crew, who's authorized to repair or replace damaged cords? Does everyone know the process to tag one out?

08 ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

All attendees confirm they participated in this Toolbox Talk and understand the content covered.

NAME (PRINT)	SIGNATURE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE

_____ Date: _____