

# Tips for Power Strip Safety In Your Home

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There is always a shortage of power outlets to plug in our many electrical devices at home and work. That makes using several power strips a modern necessity to supplement electrical systems in most homes today. But, though power strips are essential in our everyday activities, they are very dangerous when improperly used or when they're not functioning as intended. The [ESFI](#) reports that more than 3,300 residential fires start in power strips and [extension cords](#) every year in the U.S, killing or injuring hundreds of people. So, power strip safety must be a priority in every home.

Topics covered in this blog:

## Power Strip Home Safety Tips

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You may have heard some of the horrifying stories about house fires and close calls due to overloaded power strips. Everyone should be clear on best practices for using power strips at home and follow those guidelines to prevent the risk of an *avoidable* catastrophic [electrical fire](#). Below are some important fire safety tips for the use of power strips:

## Understand Power Strip Limits

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A power strip can only bear a limited amount of electricity without becoming overwhelmed. When a power strip is overloaded, sparks can fly and very quickly cause an electrical fire. Manufacturers often include information on the packaging about how much total electrical load a power strip can safely carry.

The safest power strip for your purposes is one with enough capacity to handle all the devices you plan to run through it without getting *near* the strip's maximum capacity.

**NOTE:** If the load capacity information is in a series of numbers written in unfamiliar terms, ask the store's electrical department staff to interpret the meaning of those codes for you.

The most significant figure is for the wattage the power strip can safely handle. Suppose you plug-in devices that collectively draw a total number of watts over the capacity limit indicated, for example, 1800 watts. In that case, you are overloading the power strip.

When that happens, hopefully, the consequences will be no more than a mangled mass of melted plastic power strip remains and some burned spots on the flooring. But, people have lost their entire homes due to electrical fires that originated in overloaded power strips. Remember, to be on the safe side, never use electricity that is near the power strip's limit. Use a smart power strip for energy savings and an extra layer of safety.

## How Much Electricity Your Devices Use?

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The most common devices used every day, like the examples listed below, don't consume nearly the amount of electrical power that would overload a power strip of appropriate quality and proper capacity for them. So, you'll likely be relatively safe using these small devices on such power strips.

- Laptops
- TVs
- Phone chargers
- Clocks
- Small radios

But, it is important to remember that *any* of the above or other devices do have the potential to overload a cheap power strip that is already being strained by other devices that are plugged into it.

Some appliances, like these examples below, use much larger amounts of power, but they are not normally used for prolonged periods of time, so they can still be safe to use on a power strip without overwhelming it, if not used with multiple other devices running from the same power strip:

- Coffee maker
- Iron
- Large power tools
- Hairdryer
- Vacuum cleaner

The following appliances are much larger energy consumers than those listed above. Plus they are very often kept running for hours at a time. That means these and other machines that are high electricity users can be very unsafe to run plugged into a power strip.

- Space heater

- Window air conditioner
- Dehumidifier
- Advanced gaming/high-productivity PC

Because these kinds of appliances are drawing power continuously, the maximum electrical load the power strip can withstand is reduced by around 20 percent. This means that a typical 1800-watt power strip can only continuously carry around 1440 watts of electricity safely.

## **Additional Power Strip Safety Tips**

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Is it safe to use power strips? The answer is — *if* and only *if* you use them safely, taking all appropriate safety measures, and *if* you use a high-quality power strip that is UL approved, then *yes*, they're normally safe to use. However, remember these important precautions when using power strips:

- Do not plug multiple devices that each use a lot of electricity into the same power strip. If you are not sure if it's safe to plug in the devices, ask an electricity expert.
- Never plug power strips and extension cords into each other. This is a very serious fire hazard. Power strips typically contain cheap wiring that is lower in quality than the wiring in the walls of your home. Running appliances that require a lot of electricity heats up the poor-quality wires in the power strip until an electrical fire starts.
- Before you plug any electrical device, appliance, or tool into a power strip, know your power strip's load capacity, and know how much power is already being used through it by other items plugged into it.
- Read the packaging of electrical items carefully, before plugging them into a power strip, or research through the manufacturer's website, to be sure the device's electrical consumption is appropriate for sourcing from a power strip.
- Use power strips that feature surge protection. A surge protector is an upgrade offered on many power strips, to protect your appliances, electronics, or equipment from damage in the event of a spike in voltage.

## **Finally – Get a Smoke Detector**

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Even if you are being abundantly careful with your power strip usage in your home, smoke detectors are critical backup measures for detecting fire in a home before it grows out of control. If there is a malfunction in a power strip, table-top appliance, electrical outlet, or other electrical items in your home, a working smoke detector is your first line of defense against a potentially devastating loss of property or even lives.

Smoke detectors are ideally effective when used in combination with a home security system featuring smoke alarm monitoring that prompts an urgent response from fire departments and police.

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