

The House of Cords

by Paula Rissler

It all started when I rearranged my home office. I started moving things and thought, “What the heck are all these wires?” After tracing a few, I realized that I was going to have to label them to keep track—there were too many to remember. I started labeling with masking tape and finally got it all figured out. That was when I vowed I would never let this happen to me again. It was bad enough last year when I got a new stereo cabinet and had to hook up all those electronics. My geeky son used to do all that when he lived at home. It started with the TV and then the stereo, DVD, CD, etc. You get the idea. But that was child’s play compared to the mess of cords in my office. I have a scanner and a copier and a printer and three computers (I only use one occasionally). Then there are the cell phones and the chargers. There has to be some way to manage this mess, but then Christmas came along—lights, surge protectors, extension cords, etc.

Did you know extension cords are overused and dangerous? The Consumer Products Safety Commission reports thousands of fires and injuries each year that are caused by extension cords (www.cpsc.gov). Only use cords outside that are labeled for outside use. Also, if you have a new cord, fully extend it to work out the kinks before you use it for the first time. And, of course, keep any cords away from infants, toddlers and pets.

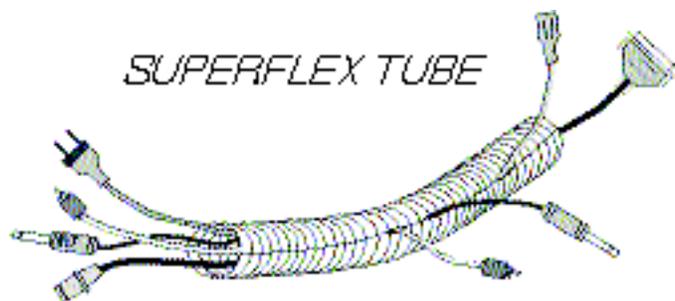
Most of us don’t have enough outlets in our home for all the electronics and appliances we have. There never seems to be enough to go around for my office. I had to buy power strips, surge protectors and extension cords. And unless you live in a newer home your wiring probably doesn’t meet the National Electric Code. I have jumbles of wires. Sure, you say, but have a look for yourself.



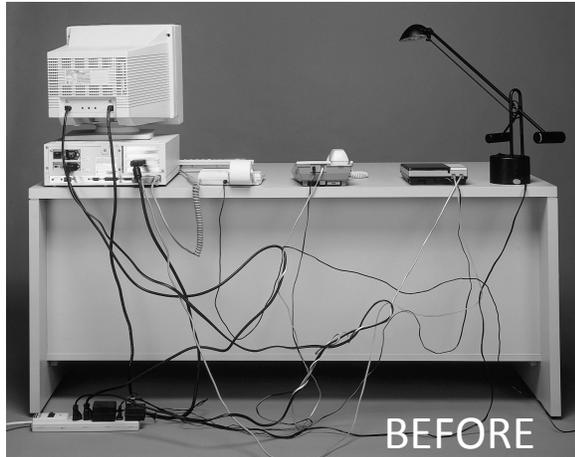
When you use an extension cord be sure that the appliance you are plugging in does not exceed the wattage capacity for that cord. Of course, the manufacturers of these cords don’t make it easy for us ordinary people—the packaging does not mention the wattage. Instead, it specifies the amount of current (or number of amps) the cord can handle. A 16-gauge cord (16 AWG) is good for smaller things such as lamps, clocks, etc. A 10- to 12-gauge cord would be for power tools or portable heaters—the thicker (fatter) the cord, the more it can handle.

Then we have the other no-nos. Don’t plug extension cords together. Don’t run the cords over any wet surface or under rugs. If the cord (or the outlet it is plugged into) is ever hot to the touch unplug the cord immediately.

Desperate, I decided to organize my mess. I ventured into my local home-improvement store and looked around. I visited the lighting area and saw some new things—or



at least new to me. There was a triple outlet that plugged into an existing outlet and created six outlets. Wow. There also was a Cord Control Kit that allowed all the wires to be put into one tube so it could contain multiple wires (it could be a little more attractive but hey it beats all those wires hanging down). It even has colored labels for the end of each plug—goodbye masking tape. The Kit comes in black, gray, red and white and is available at www.getorg.com.



The full-length slit allows the cords to enter and exit the tube at any point so all you see is the last inch or two of cord. Each Kit also contains 32 color-coded labels for the cord ends and jacks. With these labels anyone can hook up the most complicated equipment by simply matching colors. The tube also comes in different diameters, depending on how many cords you have.

Finally, let's look at power strips and surge protectors. A power strip is just that, a device that provides an additional four to six grounded three-prong outlets. These strips are great for most household items and small appliances. Don't use them in the bathroom or outside as moisture and open outlets can be dangerous. *Warning:* As with extension cords the total wattage plugged into the strip should not exceed the wattage capacity for the strip.

Surge-protectors are power strips equipped to suppress spikes in electricity. This is what we all need for our computers, home theater equipment, answering machines or anything that stores programmed information that could be lost in a power surge. They are more expensive than a regular power strip and must be plugged into a grounded three-prong outlet. So as you can see I have become extremely knowledgeable about this subject. I just have to buy the items and unhook and reconnect everything using these great new gadgets. I'll let you all know how it goes.

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