

Holiday Gift Guide: Protecting Big-Ticket Items



Big-ticket electronics, such as televisions, computers and gaming consoles, are at the top of many holiday wish lists. While safety may not be the first thing that comes to mind when shopping the holiday sales, purchasing, installing, and operating these items safely protects not only this expensive equipment, but also the entire home.

Safety Tips

- Always purchase electrical devices from a reputable retailer that you trust. Be especially wary when making online purchases.
- Check that all electrical items are certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Intertek (ETL).
- Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions before use.
- Send warranty and product registration forms for new items to manufacturers in order to be notified about product recalls. Recall information is also available on the website of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (<http://www.cpsc.gov>).
- Never install an exterior television or radio antenna close enough to contact power lines if it falls.
- Arrange furniture so that there are outlets available for equipment without the use of extension cords.
- Do not place power cords or extension cords in high traffic areas or under carpets, rugs or furniture, and never nail or staple them to the wall or baseboard.
- Never remove the ground pin (the third prong) to make a three-prong plug fit into a two-prong outlet.
- All appliances and cords should be kept in good condition. Examine them regularly for damage, and repair or dispose of damaged items.
- Keep cords out of reach of children and pets.
- Make sure entertainment centers and computer workstations have enough space around them for ventilation of electronic equipment.
- Keep liquids, including drinks, away from electrical devices. Spills can result in dangerous shocks or fires.
- Unplug equipment when not in use to save energy and reduce the risks for shocks or fires. Power strips or surge protectors make a good central turnoff point.
- Always unplug electrical items by grasping the plug firmly rather than pulling on the cord.
- If you receive any kind of shock from a large appliance or any other electrical device, stop using it until an electrician has checked it.
- If an appliance smokes or sparks, or if you feel a tingle or light shock when it's on, stop using it. Discard and replace it or have it repaired by an authorized service provider.





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Surge Protectors

Surges are sudden and unwanted increases in voltage that can damage, degrade, or destroy the sensitive electronic equipment in your home. A surge protector is designed to protect your computer, television, and other valuable electronic equipment from power surges. The standard voltage in most outlets in U.S. homes is 120 volts. If the voltage rises above 120 volts, a surge protector helps prevent the increase from ruining your device and its components. Surge protectors are best paired with televisions, computers, stereos, and other electronics that have delicate circuitry.

Remember that while surge protectors protect equipment from surges, they do not protect from the potential hazards of an overloaded circuit. Make sure the electrical load does not exceed the capacity for the circuit.

Surge Protector or Power Strip?

Although surge protectors and power strips both allow you to plug several devices in one location, it is important for consumers to understand that they are not interchangeable. A true surge protector includes internal components that divert or suppress the extra current from surges, protecting your valuable electronics from electrical spikes, while a power strip simply provides more outlets for a circuit.

Extension Cords

Extension cords provide a convenient solution for delivering power right where it's needed, but improper use can have tragic consequences. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that about 3,300 home fires start from extension cords each year, killing and injuring more than 300 people. In addition, nearly 4,000 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year for non-fire related extension cord injuries. Minimize the risks by taking simple safety precautions.

Safety Tips

- Extension cords are meant to provide a temporary solution. They should not be used as a long-term or permanent electrical circuit.
- Examine cords before each use. Cracked, frayed, or otherwise damaged cords should be replaced immediately.
- Never use a cord that feels hot or is damaged in any way. Touching even a single exposed strand can result in an electric shock or burn.
- To avoid overheating extension cords, do not place them under furniture or carpeting, or inside walls.
- Keep extension cords out of high traffic areas, like doorways, to minimize tripping hazards.
- Only use weather-resistant, heavy gauge extension cords marked "for outdoor use" outside.
- Keep all outdoor extension cords clear of snow and standing water.