



Celebrate Electrical Safety

In 1879, the first fatal accident due to electric shock occurred. Does that seem surprising? Maybe it happened because it was a new form of energy that we truly didn't understand. Fast forward to today and we know so much more about electricity and how to handle it safely, or so you would think. You see, we continue to have electrical accidents.

May is national electrical safety month and an opportunity to learn more about working with electricity safely. The National Fire Protection Association defines electrical safety as "recognizing hazards associated with the use of electrical energy and taking precautions so that hazards do not cause injury or death." The problem is that oftentimes we might not RECOGNIZE the hazard until it's too late. Although I can't possibly share all of the potential hazards, here are some basic safety actions so you don't become a statistic. Be a model for safety!

Electrical Safety Actions for Home

- 1) **Always cut the power before you work on an electrical item.** If you ever must deal with electrical issues, always cut the power at the breaker box. Before you start work, test to make sure the outlet, fixture, or switch is shut off. Then plug something in, flip the switch, and use a tester. It will only take a few seconds to cut the power and test the circuit.
- 2) **Investigate flickering lights.** A flickering light often means the fixture or the circuit has loose wires somewhere. Or that the bulb has come loose and there isn't a consistent flow of electricity. Tighten the bulb. If that doesn't fix it, call an electrician.
- 3) **Use more than one outlet.** Do you have an outlet with more than two things plugged into it? Most likely you have an outlet strip with several things plugged into it; this is not a safe setup. Try to distribute small appliances and electronic devices to several outlets to avoid overwhelming the one. Alternatively, have an electrician add additional outlets.
- 4) **Install ground fault circuit interrupters.** A ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) shuts off if it detects the current is being diverted due to a short circuit or insulation problem. This helps protect people from being shocked, and it prevents fires due to electrical faults. GFCI devices should be installed in bathrooms and kitchens.
- 5) **Don't touch.** From the article, "How Electricity Affects Your Body," the author states, "Education about the respect for electricity and safe work practices is critical in preventing injuries from electrical shock. Any electrical device that may be touched by the body could be life threatening and should be properly grounded and protected."
- 6) **When outside, never touch a downed line.** You cannot tell when a line is energized by looking at it. And, a line can become energized when devices operate on the electrical system. To know, the line must be tested by a qualified lineworker from the cooperative.

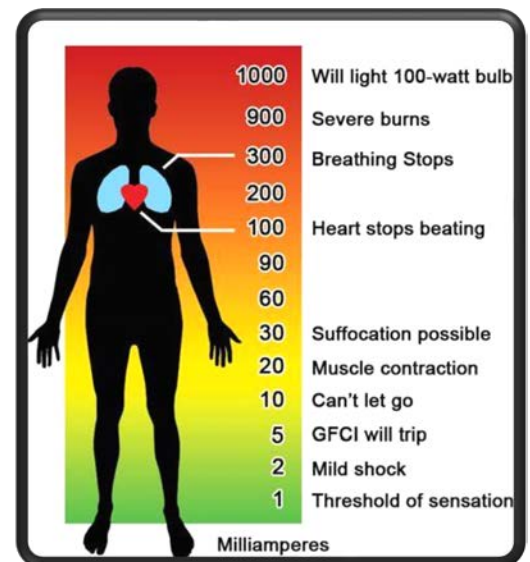


Image from website article on "How Electricity affects Your Body" at testguy.net.