

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- Mulch fires occur more frequently than we would expect. Learn how to prevent one from happening near your home or business.
- Not all extension cords are the same! Is the cord you are using right for the job?
- The cumulative dollar loss for accidental fires this fiscal year has surpassed \$5 million.
- Spring into safety with a few spring cleaning tips.

The Fire 4-1-1

MAY 2017

Unintentional Fire Data

Despite being one of the most industrialized and technologically advanced countries in the world, the United States continues to have a fire problem. Loudoun County is no different. By understanding the fire problem, the Loudoun County Fire Marshal's Office can deploy strategies to effectively prevent and mitigate the fire issue thus creating a safer working and living environment for residents, workers, and travelers. The information included in this newsletter demonstrates some of the common accidental fire causes encountered in Loudoun County throughout the previous quarter and cumulatively throughout the fiscal year (July 2016-June 2017). If you have any questions regarding this information please contact the Fire Marshal's Office at 703-737-8600.



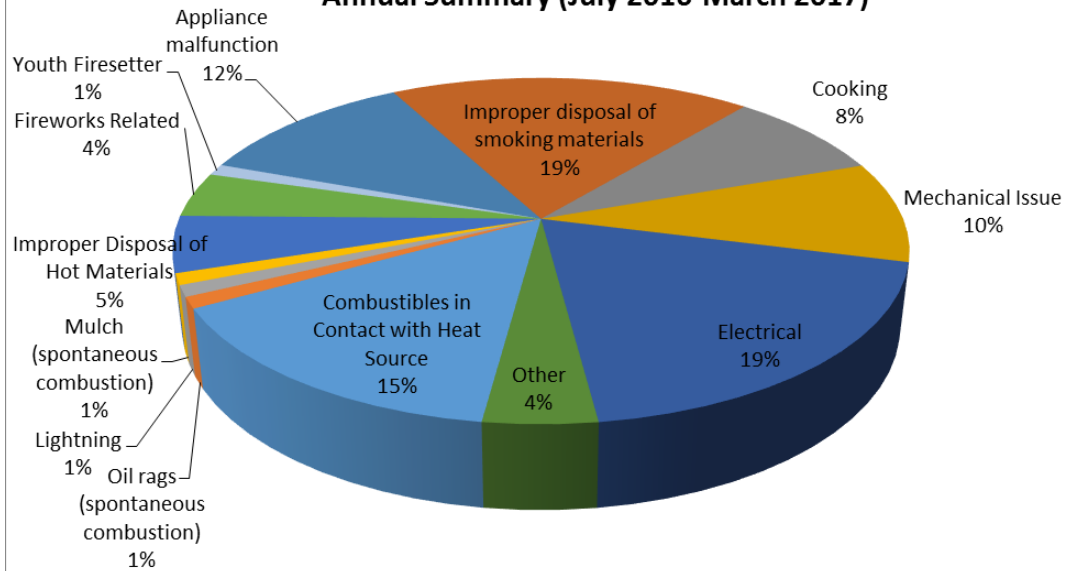
This fire was the result of an electrical failure within a wall. It caused \$65,000 in damages and displaced the residents.

Accidental Fire Data for Fiscal Year 2017 Third Quarter

Fire Cause	Total Number of Fires	Total Dollar Loss Q3
Appliance malfunction	7	\$342,200.00
Improper disposal of smoking materials	6	\$183,750.00
Electrical	6	\$1,351,350.00
Combustibles in contact with heat source	5	\$121,010.00
Mechanical Issue	3	\$80,000.00
Improper disposal of hot materials	3	\$80,000.00
Cooking	1	\$5,000.00
Fireworks related	1	\$1,000.00
Burn Injury	1	\$0.00
Total Number of Unintentional Fires	33	
Total Cost of Damages		\$2,164,310.00

*For more specific descriptions of fire causes visit www.loudoun.gov/firerisk.

Frequency of Accidental Fires by Fire Cause Annual Summary (July 2016-March 2017)



Mulch Fire Awareness

- *Keep landscaped mulch beds as moist as possible especially during hot and dry spells. Windy conditions allow mulch fires to start more readily.*
- *Dispose of smoking materials into a sturdy metal or ceramic container filled with sand and place the container away from any building.*
- *Maintain at least 18 inches of clearance between the edge of the mulch bed and combustible building materials, such as exterior vinyl siding and decks.*
- *Use non-combustible materials such as pea gravel or crushed rock for the first 18" around the base of a building with combustible siding.*
- *Immediately report any smoke or fire in a mulch bed by calling 9-1-1.*

Each year during spring and summer, numerous mulch fires are reported across the county. These fires often smolder and start out small but can quickly grow into a devastating fire, causing major damage to buildings, homes, and other structures. Since these fires begin outside a home or building, where there usually is no fire alarm system, they often go undetected until they have grown significantly making them exceptionally dangerous.

The most common cause of mulch fires is human carelessness through improper discarding of smoking materials. Smokers often discard lit smoking materials, including matches, cigarettes, and cigars, into landscaped areas as they enter or exit a building. "Businesses and residences should provide and maintain a safe receptacle for the disposal of smoking materials," said Fire Chief W. Keith Brower, Jr. "Sturdy metal or ceramic containers filled with sand, placed away from the structure, are best."

Fires that start in landscaping mulch or other organic materials can spread quickly into shrubbery, up exterior walls and into the home or building. For this reason, we recommend leaving 18 inches between mulch and the exterior walls of all structures. Use non-combustible materials such as river rock, pea gravel or crushed rock for the first 18" around the base of a building with combustible siding and around gas and electrical meters.

Use caution and common sense when it comes to landscaping and prevent mulch fires around your home or business. Find additional safety tips in the left-hand column or visit www.loudoun.gov/fireprevention.

This fire was the result of improperly discarded smoking materials. This can occur when smoking materials are discarded in potted plants, landscaping, mulch, dried grasses, etc.



Extension Cord Selection and Use

The misuse of extension cords is a common issue related to electrical fire safety. By identifying and removing fire risks, residents can play a critical role in fire prevention. When using an extension cord, it is critical to select the proper type for your specific use. Below is a list of tips to assist you in choosing the proper extension cord:

- **Extension cords are for temporary use only.** The wiring in an extension cord is not designed for long term use meaning that continual use over a long period of time can cause the cord to wear faster creating a fire hazard. If you use an extension cord regularly consider having an electrician install additional outlets.
- **Determine the total amperage of the items being supplied by the extension cord.** Most appliances are required to have a label that indicates how much wattage or amperes are needed to adequately supply the unit. It is important to know how much amperes it uses so the proper extension can be selected.

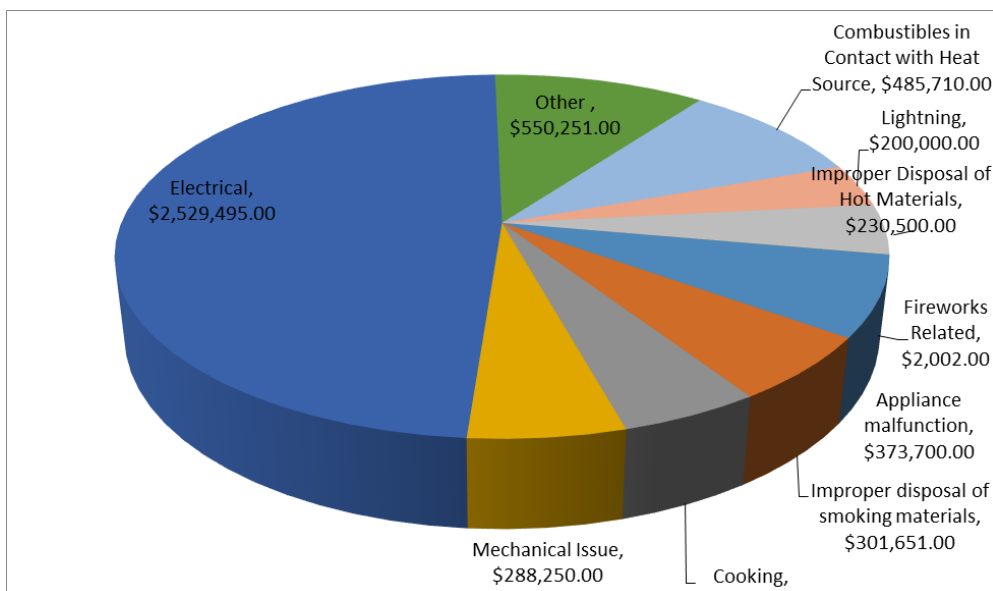
Why Is It Important?

Ampere ratings are important because as electrical current (amperes) moves through a conductor (a wire), heat is produced. If there are more amperes flowing through the conductor than it is designed to handle, overcurrent occurs. Overcurrent is when the conductor cannot dissipate the heat which can cause fires by igniting nearby combustibles or causing an arc (a break in the conductor) with melted metal being thrown several feet. If the label provides power requirement in watts, use the formula below to convert it to amperes.

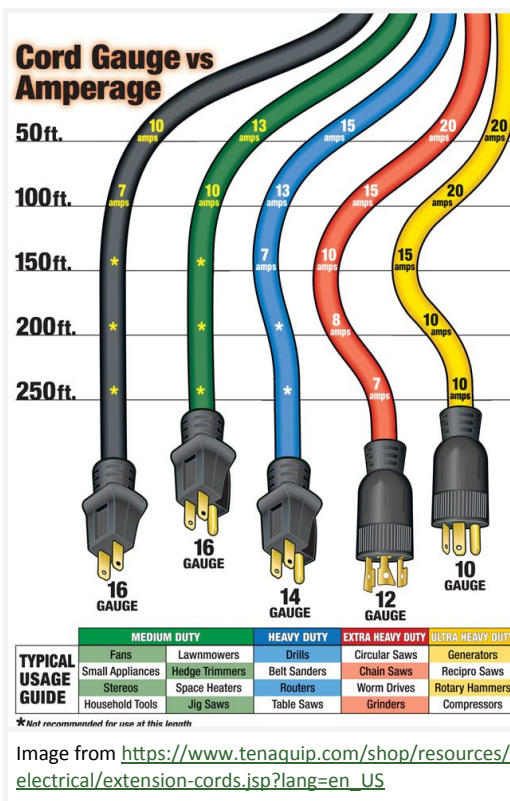
Number of watts / 120* = amperes

*Electrical sockets (outlets) in the United States of America usually supply electricity at between 110 and 120 volts AC.

Accidental Fire Dollar Loss By Fire Cause (July 2016-March 2017)



- **Decide on the appropriate extension cord length.** The further electricity must travel, the more amperes are necessary to support it. Use a cord that is only as long as you need. Also, there is a significant difference between indoor and outdoor extension cords, ensure the proper one is selected for its intended use.
- **Select the proper gauge extension cord.** Extension cords have three classifications; light (1-10 ampere rating), medium (10-15 ampere rating), and heavy (16-20 ampere rating). Every cord should be labeled with the size wire it contains which usually looks like "16/3" engraved on the outer coating. Sixteen is the size of the wire and the number three indicates the number of individual wires inside the outer insulation or layer. This information will help you determine what amperes the cord was designed for. Note: The larger the gauge number the smaller the wire and the less ampere the wire can handle. See graphic to the right for further guidance.



- **Ensure that the extension cords and electrical appliances are marked with a label from an independent testing laboratory.** This indicated the product meets industry standards for safety. Underwriters Laboratories (UL mark), Intertek (ETL mark) or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA mark) are common testing laboratory.
- **Never place extension cords under rugs/carpet or pinched between furniture.** Damages cords can go unnoticed in these areas.

**Contact a qualified electrician if you have any questions regarding electrical questions or concerns.



Loudoun County Fire Marshal's Office

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Phone: 703-737-8600

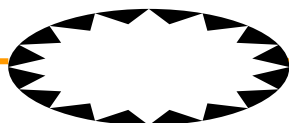
Fax: 703-737-8595

www.loudoun.gov/firemarshal

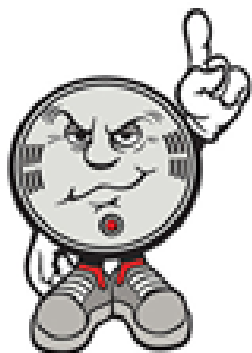
The Fire Marshal's Office seeks to provide a safe working and living environment for residents, workers, and travelers within Loudoun County. Key aspects of the mission include:

- Investigation into the origin and cause of fire- and explosive-related incidents in the county as well as offenses related to threats to burn and/or bomb
- Investigation into the release of hazardous materials
- Juvenile firesetter intervention
- Proactive public fire and life safety education programs
- Rapid and professional emergency response
- Reduction of fire risk through abatement of common fire prevention code violations

There are several special operational programs, such as the Bomb Squad and the Canine Program, however these are collateral responsibilities assigned to regular staff, which transcend section boundaries.



Smoke alarms are one of the best and easiest safety features you can have to alert you and your family if there is a fire in your home. Domino's and Loudoun County Fire and Rescue are rewarding select customers who have properly functioning smoke alarms with FREE Domino's pizza! When you place a delivery order during the designated timeframe you could be eligible to have your order de-



PUT A FINGER ON IT!
WORKING SMOKE ALARMS SAVE LIVES.

livered aboard a fire engine. If all of the smoke alarms in your home are working, your order is FREE. If the smoke alarms are not working, the firefighters will replace the batteries or install with fully functioning alarms. For more information about participating locations and dates see below.

- * Purcellville location on Thursday, May 18th from 5:30pm-7:30pm.
- * Ashburn location (Southern Walk Plaza) on Thursday, May 25th from 5pm-7pm.

Loudoun County Fire and Rescue provides free smoke alarm assessments to residents throughout the year. For more information or to request your assessment call 703-737-8093 or visit www.loudoun.gov/smokealarms.