

# ELECTRICAL SAFETY AT HOME

Each year there are 20,000 electrical fires in UK homes. Most are caused by electrical products.

**Don't become a statistic.**



Funded by Electrical Safety First



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[www.groundwork.org.uk/gwfc-green-doctor](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/gwfc-green-doctor)

# 9 out of 10 electrical fires are caused by electrical products.

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Millions of people in the UK expose themselves to potentially fatal electrical accidents in the home by making simple mistakes.

Make sure everyone in your household understands how to use electricity and electric goods responsibly and safely:

- > Always read and follow instructions for all electrical items.
- > Check plugs, sockets and cables regularly for signs of damage or scorching.
- > Only charge laptops, phones, tablets and other electrical devices on a hard surface such as a desk or table.
- > Unplug or at least switch off appliances before you go to bed or leave the house.
- > Avoid putting drinks on or near electric appliances. Liquid and electricity are a lethal combination.
- > Look out for and avoid fake or unbranded electrical items.

This leaflet will give you advice on staying safe at home, with easy to follow steps.

It is also important to make sure that the electrical wiring in your home is well maintained, and that you use a registered electrician to check it at least once every ten years.

More information on all topics and more information can be found on the Electrical Safety First website: [www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk)

## Easy visual checks



- Check that you have RCD (residual current device) protection in your fusebox. This is a life-saving device that switches the electricity off automatically if there is a fault.
- Ensure that plugs and sockets are not damaged and check cables for damage, wear and tear, and that the plug is fastened securely.
- Check that your light fittings are not visibly damaged and that downlighters are in good working condition.
- Never have loose cables through the room or let cables trail under carpets or rugs.
- Always unplug or at least switch off your electrical items when they are not in use.
- Have a working smoke alarm on each floor,



**Make sure that your plug sockets are not overloaded.** Use the online calculator to check your home is safe. Scan the QR code or visit [www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/overloadingsockets](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/overloadingsockets)

## Safe use of electricals at home

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- Always buy from a retailer you can trust and follow the instructions.
- Keep portable heaters at least a metre away from flammable materials. Never dry clothes directly on or near your heater.
- Don't leave electrical items running overnight or when you are out.
- If your appliance begins making a strange noise or isn't working properly, unplug it and contact the manufacturer or a qualified repair technician.
- Clean vents in your kitchen and bathroom regularly to keep dust from building up. Also clean behind your fridge and freezer, and make sure there is enough room for air to circulate.
- Clean your oven/hob regularly to avoid a build-up of food and fat.
- Only put things in the microwave that are marked as microwave safe.
- Always register new electrical appliances so that the manufacturer can contact you if there's a problem.

## What to do if there is a fire

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- Keep calm and act quickly, get everyone out as soon as possible.
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- If there's smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.
- Before you open a door, check if it's warm. If it is, don't open it as there'll be fire on the other side.
- Call 999 as soon as you're clear of the building.



# Electric bikes and scooters

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Many people use e-bikes to get to work or school, but their lithium-ion batteries can catch fire from poor design, incorrect charging, or damage.

Due to the risk of fire and explosions, it's important to buy a battery and charger that conforms to UK safety standards and has been tested.

## When buying, make sure you:

- > Only purchase from a reputable retailer. Don't buy from market stalls, social media or online marketplaces.
- > Get a replacement from the original manufacturer if the original charger is not available.
- > Ensure the battery you want to buy is of good quality. Check for misspellings, bad translations and attempts to copy larger brands, this will likely be a fake.
- > Check for warranty cards and instructions, fake items will often be missing these. If they are not included, do not buy.





### Using and charging your battery safely:

- > Disconnect the battery and unplug the charger when the charge cycle is complete. Don't leave it on charge overnight.
- > Regularly check the condition of the battery and look for dents, deformation and signs of overheating. Stop using or charging the battery as soon as you notice any damage and replace it.
- > Charge your battery in a safe place, ensuring it does not block your escape routes if there is a fire.
- > Avoid charging a battery close to combustible materials or hazardous substances.
- > Don't charge the battery in sunlight or high temperatures.
- > Don't cover the battery while charging.

# Portable heaters

Most portable heater fires are caused by people making basic mistakes that could easily be avoided.

Elderly people trying to stay warm during the cold months and children who are playing are particularly at risk, so please make extra sure that they are safe.

## Follow these simple safety tips:

- Follow manufacturer's instructions and regularly clean your heater to reduce fire risks.
- Put your heater on a level surface and out of the way to avoid trips.
- Do not dry clothes directly on or near your heater.
- Never leave your heater unattended when it's in use or while you are asleep.
- Make sure it is at least a metre away from furniture or curtains.
- Only buy from recognised manufacturers and retailers, and be careful when buying online.
- Register your purchase with the manufacturer so you are alerted if there is a product recall.



# Buying electrical items online

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**People see cheap electrical goods as a bargain, but fake and low-quality electrical products could result in fire, severe injury or even death.**

The increase in the popularity of online shopping makes it even easier for dangerous goods to be bought by unsuspecting people. The best way to protect yourself is to buy your electrical products from reputable retailers either on the high street or via their websites.

If you want to buy second hand, stick to reputable charity shops such as the British Heart Foundation as they have procedures for checking and testing.

## Stay safe when buying online:

- Check the voltage of products is 230V/50Hz (UK's standard domestic voltage) and that they are fitted with a UK plug with a fuse.
- Never use a travel adaptor.
- Don't fully rely on CE or UKCA marks as a guarantee of safety. These marks are a declaration by the manufacturer it meets UK and European law requirements and is safe to use. You must look out for these but don't fully trust them, as these can also be faked.
- Use online review websites to find out what people are saying about products and sellers.
- Read the product guarantees, sellers' terms and conditions, returns policies and privacy statements.
- Use a credit card when spending £100 or more, so you can hold both the trader and credit card company liable if something goes wrong.
- Keep records of anything you order.



### Before you buy, check:

- Is the item much cheaper than you expected? If so, it's likely fake.
- Do website photos of the product and its packaging look genuine?
- Does the site offer information about user instructions and guarantees?
- Are the seller reviews and product feedback positive?
- Are the manufacturer's contact details, and/or the product's country of origin, provided on the site?

When it arrives, check that it is fitted with a standard UK plug or conversion plug (not a travel adaptor). Check that the packaging and delivery notes look genuine and that it comes with instructions and a guarantee.

Check for any damage and listen for loose fittings. When you start using the item, do not leave it unattended until you are sure it is safe.

### Do not use the product if:

- It isn't working properly or won't work all the time.
- It speeds up or down without warning.
- The outer casing seems too hot to the touch.
- You can see smoke coming from it, or smell burning.

# Product recalls and faults

The average success rate of an electrical product recall is just 10-20%.

This means that there are potentially millions of recalled items being used in homes.

If you have any suspicions about a product's safety, or if you think it's a fake, do not use it and contact the seller. Put your complaint in writing and keep copies of any correspondence.

## If you are not satisfied with the response:

- Some auction websites like eBay or third-party bodies (PayPal, Klarna) can help. See their terms and conditions before buying.
- If the product cost more than £100 and you paid by credit card, contact your credit card company. They may refund you and take up your complaint with the seller.
- Leave a review to warn shoppers. Stick to the facts and make sure any claims are accurate.
- Report it to Trading Standards so that they can take action. Selling unsafe products is illegal and puts lives at risk.

**Important Safety Recall.**



**Check if any of your electrical goods have been recalled.**

Scan the QR code or visit [www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls](http://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls)

# FURTHER HELP

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## Get a free Green Doctor home visit

Our money and energy experts will give you FREE tailored advice on electrical safety, energy efficiency, and saving money.

[www.groundwork.org.uk/gwfc-green-doctor](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/gwfc-green-doctor)

## Visit the Electrical Safety First website

Stay safe at home and get more electrical safety advice at

[www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk)

## Citizens Advice Helpline

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) / 08454 04 05 06

## Trading Standards

[www.gov.uk/find-local-tradingstandards-office](http://www.gov.uk/find-local-tradingstandards-office)

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