



SAVE YOURSELF A SHOCK

You don't have to be an electrician to check for these common household problems. Sue White of Liberty Mutual and Barbara R. Guthrie, director of Consumer Affairs for Underwriters Laboratories (UL), offer solutions.

Damaged cords. Don't run cords under rugs or furniture; they may overheat or become frayed, exposing live wires. "Also, dogs and cats can chew cords," White says. "Any of these things can lead to a fire."

Overloaded outlets. "Don't gang too many items onto one extension cord or power strip," Guthrie cautions. The thickness and length of an extension cord determine how much power it can transmit safely. Check store tags for cords' wattage ratings. "Choose cords labeled with the UL Mark of Safety," Guthrie says.

Nonfunctional GFCIs. Identifiable by their "test" and "reset" buttons, ground-

fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) cut off power if they detect a leak or imbalance of electricity. They are required in kitchens and bathrooms of new construction. A GFCI costs about \$12 and easily can be installed by a handy homeowner. Test your GFCIs monthly; they can save lives.

Two-prong, ungrounded outlets. Building codes now require three-prong "grounded" receptacles, which carry away stray electricity. If your older home has two-prong outlets, ask an electrician if you can retrofit.

Loose plugs. Outlets can wear out. Replace them if you find they no longer hold plugs firmly.

Kidproof the house

Every parent expects to childproof living spaces for infants and toddlers, but these household hazards may pose a threat to older kids as well:

- **FIRE STARTERS.** Store gasoline cans and other flammable materials where children can't get to them and safely away from combustion sources such as heaters and water heaters. When teaching your kids about smoke alarms and fire extinguishers, emphasize the most basic rule: Never play with matches, lighters, candles or other fire-related items.
- **GUNS AND AMMO.** Store ammunition and weapons separately. Install trigger locks on guns and secure them behind an additional barrier. Teach your children about the dangers of firearms so they can identify unsafe situations in their friends' homes.
- **POWER TOOLS.** Make sure kids know that only adults should operate machines for cutting and burning. Keep all dangerous tools locked away.
- **SWIMMING POOLS.** Never let children swim unsupervised. Cordon off the pool and lock gates when it is not in use.

SILENT KILLER STRIKES IN WINTER

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas produced by burning wood, fuel, charcoal and other combustibles. While the amount emitted from home appliances is usually harmless, malfunctions can put your family at risk—especially in the winter, when heaters and fireplaces are used. Low-level CO exposures can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness and lightheadedness. High-level exposures can be fatal within minutes.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends installing at least one CO detector near sleeping areas, where it can wake people groggy from CO exposure. For more protection, install a detector on each level and near the furnace room. (Place it five feet from the furnace to prevent false alarms.)

If your CO alarm goes off and family members have symptoms of poisoning, leave the house immediately, call the fire department and seek medical help. If no one has symptoms, open windows to ventilate the house, turn off all possible sources of the CO and call a service technician to pinpoint the problem.

