

Keep Cool and Safe this Summer

Air Conditioner Safety Tips from Breton Electric

The heat of summer can be more than just uncomfortable. For some folks, it can be quite dangerous. Staying out of the sun, wearing loose clothing, and drinking lots of water helps. But, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), air-conditioning is the No.1 protection against heat-related illness and death.

However, as with all things electrical, care must be taken to ensure that no safety hazards are present. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation (ESFI), contact with electric current from air conditioners accounts for a significant number of electrocutions and electrical injuries each year. The U. S. Fire Administration says that, while some electrical fires are caused by electrical system failures and appliance defects, many more are caused by misuse and poor maintenance of electrical appliances, incorrectly installed wiring, and overloaded circuits and extension cords.

To avoid dangerous situations while your unit is running, please follow these guidelines:

- Be sure that both the electrical circuit and the electrical outlet can handle the load. When in doubt, have a licensed electrician inspect your home's wiring and advise you as to whether it will safely handle air conditioning units. Check the specifications of the air conditioning unit; some require a dedicated circuit.
- Always plug an air conditioner into a grounded (three-prong) outlet. If an appliance cord plug doesn't fit an outlet, have a qualified electrician replace the outlet.
- If you *must* use an extension cord to reach a grounded outlet, make certain that you use a cord designed for air conditioners and that it is UL listed, meets OSHA specification, and can handle the power needed by your air conditioner. NOTE: Some manufacturers will not honor warranties if the unit is plugged in using an extension cord.

As with all extension cord use, always inspect before you use! Ensure that the plug's blades and grounding pin are present and do not use extension cords that are cut or damaged. And, never run any extension cord under a carpet!

Breton Electric also recommends using ENERGY STAR rated appliances. Replacing a 10-year-old room air conditioner with a new ENERGY STAR qualified model saves an average of \$25 a year on your electric bill.

(www.energystar.gov)

To further reduce your energy expenses during the summer, here are some tips from Underwriters Laboratories (UL):

- Have your air conditioner cleaned and inspected before summer.
- Conduct routine maintenance checks during the summer such as regularly changing or cleaning filters.
- Don't let heat build up and then attempt to cool areas immediately by turning the controls to maximum settings. Start units early and cool areas throughout the day.
- Close blinds and curtains on the west and south sides of your home to block out the sun.
- Turn off all unnecessary lights.
- Wait until late evening to use heat-producing appliances like ovens, dishwashers and clothes dryers.
- Close off unused rooms.

Stay cool AND safe!