

# **Alabama Department of Public Health, Technical Services Unit**

## **Extension Cords and Power Strips**

05/16/00; Case Study added 09/16/02

From CMS's All States Letter Number 22-99:

A number of questions have been raised about the use of extension cords and multi-outlet extensions (power strips) in health care occupancies.

Sections 12-5.1, 13-5.1, and 7-1.2 of the 1985 edition of NFPA 101 (Life Safety Code) require health care occupancies to comply with the 1984 edition of NFPA 70, the National Electrical Code. The 1984 edition of the National Electrical Code restricts the use of extension cords to temporary short term uses. It is the policy of HCFA to prohibit non-circuit breaker protected extension cords in health care. The limited use of circuit breaker protected power strips is acceptable, provided the current is limited to 15 amps or less, and no major appliances such as air conditioners, refrigerators, or heating units are connected to the power strip. Widespread use of power strips may indicate the need for additional wiring.

**CASE STUDY:** An early-morning warehouse fire in West Virginia was caused by overheating of a pair of power strips (extension cords) in the office area. Investigators determined that the fire began where a portable electric heater and other equipment had been connected to a multi-outlet electrical strip, and then plugged into a second multi-outlet strip which had other equipment connected to it. This arrangement had previously tripped the circuit breaker, but had not been corrected. The noncombustible building and its contents, valued at over \$1.1 million, were completely destroyed.

(As described in the Jan/Feb 2002 issue of NFPA Journal)