

Be fire safe with your gadgets

Electronics can pose a fire risk if they're used or charged incorrectly

The electronic gadgets in our lives have become so commonplace that we often forget they run on good, old-fashioned electricity, and that electricity can pose major risks when not used correctly. Remember the following when using and charging your gizmos to stay safe while making the most of the tech in your life.

Buy certified chargers

When buying things like phone or tablet chargers, check the device for a recognized Canadian certification mark. Common marks are from CSA, ULC and ETLc. These indicate that the device has passed Canadian testing standards, which may be more rigorous than those required in other countries. There are regular news reports of phone chargers starting fires in homes, but that's not the only risk. If a charger is faulty, it can supply your phone or tablet with too much power, possibly damaging your device or causing it to overheat and catch fire. If you've spent \$900 on a phone, invest in a certified charger.

Fray it ain't so

It can be tempting to keep using charging cables when they're starting to come apart at the ends, fraying and exposing the wiring inside. While a typical certified USB charger doesn't supply a lot of electricity to a device, there's still a risk that a frayed wire connecting to the device could cause a short within the charger itself. And that's how fires can start. Just as with other electrical cords or cables in your home, fraying cables increase the chances of sparking.

Careful where you charge

Tablets, laptops and phones often generate heat while their batteries are charging, so be careful where you put them when you plug them in. A hard, non-combustible surface is always the best place to charge a device, so don't charge your phone on your bed, a sofa, a pillow or anything else that can sit flush against the device and prevent heat from escaping while it charges. If anything does go wrong with your phone and it overheats while charging, you don't want a fire to spread beyond the device itself.

Be extra careful with "waterproof" devices!

All sorts of electronic gadgets bill themselves as being waterproof, but there are a few big caveats that don't make it into the ads. Don't plug in a wet device, as water can make it into ports and will take time to dry out. Similarly, the charger isn't waterproof, so don't get it wet. And never, ever use a waterproof device around water while it's charging.

Worth repeating

Remember:

- Don't tinker inside your electrical stuff to save a few bucks on the cost of repair. Take it to someone who knows what they're doing.
- Don't remove the ground prong from a cord because the outlet you want to use it with doesn't have a hole for the ground prong. The device is designed to work with that ground prong, and removing it creates completely unnecessary danger.
- Only use your electrical devices for the manufacturer's intended purpose. A toaster oven isn't designed to heat your home.

