



ELECTRICAL HAZARDS IN THE CLASSROOM

BY VALENCE YOUNG

Working with electrical equipment is wired into an educator's day. We handle SMART Boards, computers, audio-visual carts, and extension cords. If this wiring and equipment is damaged, faulty, or misused, it can become an electrical hazard. When something goes wrong, there can be a release of electrical charge into the body. The effects can range from a mild tingling sensation to serious harm, including unconsciousness, burns, internal injuries, and death. Given the risks, one would assume that the wiring and equipment in our schools would be in top shape. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) requires that your school board and your principal take every precaution reasonable for your health and safety. This means that electrical equipment has to be in good working condition and you need to be informed about electrical hazards. For your part, if you know about an actual or potential hazard, you need to report this to your principal.

Identifying electrical hazards should be part of your school's monthly health and safety inspection, with a prompt response from your principal. Keep in mind that your Joint Health and Safety Committee brings health and safety issues to the school board's attention. If you have concerns about ongoing electrical hazards at your school, make sure that your JHSC knows too.

FIVE HAZARDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

SMART Board wiring: Adapting to new technology does not mean putting up with a tangle of extension cords. If the SMART Board in your classroom is set up with power bars and daisy-chained extension cords, your school board needs to install more wall outlets.

Ordinary outlets near water sources: An electrical outlet within 1.5 metres of a water source such as a classroom sink needs to be equipped with a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). The GFCI outlet can trip the circuit when there is a mismatch in the electrical current. It protects people from electric shock.

Faulty equipment: Broken electrical equipment is unsafe. If a plug won't fit snugly, there could be damage within the outlet or the plug. If any electrical equipment needs to be coaxed into service, it's time to take it out of service.

Loose wires underfoot: Electrical cords and power bars may be damaged if they are out in the open and are stepped on, tripped over or hit by equipment. The principal must ensure that these electrical cords and power bars are protected and off the floor.

Bringing your own: Resist the temptation to provide electrical equipment for use in your classroom. It is the school board's responsibility to provide and maintain the electrical equipment in the school. The school board has to ensure that the electrical equipment is approved for its intended use. Let the school board do its job.

Once you start looking for electrical hazards, you see them – everywhere. When you report an actual or potential electrical hazard at school, you help protect everyone in the school community. Get support at the school from your ETFO local steward and your health and safety representative. Get advice from your ETFO Local president. Your president can contact ETFO Provincial for further information. ■

Valence Young is an executive staff member of ETFO Protective Services.



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