devices in your dorm room or apartment, rules which may look like they’ve been created with your maximum inconvenience in mind.

Oh, No! Not More Rules!!!

Your college has probably given you rules by the hundreds... maybe the thousands. Among them are surely rules on electrical

ESFi
Electrical Safety Foundation International

1300 North 17th Street
Suite 1847
Rosslyn, VA 22209
Phone 703.841.3229
Fax 703.841.3329
E-mail info@esfi.org
www.electrical-safety.org

Printing donated by Leviton Manufacturing Co., Inc.
A halogen lamp may reach temperatures hot enough to ignite curtains or blankets that are too close, or a towel you’ve inappropriately draped over the lamp. If your floor lamp has a 500 W bulb in it, replacing it with a 300 W bulb will help reduce hot temperatures. Make sure there is a wire mesh shield over the bulb/ lens. Some colleges and schools have outlawed the use of halogen floor lamps. Floor lamps with fluorescent bulbs are approved because they run much cooler and use only a quarter of the energy.

Extension cords can short circuit, overheat and ignite if they are buried under carpet, if they have furniture resting on and pinching them, or if they are bunched up behind hot equipment. By the way, the extension cord is underrated—if there’s more demand on it than it can handle. Overloading an outlet will cause a fuse to blow or a circuit breaker to open. This safety feature may prevent electrocution or fire. It will certainly annoy that really scary looking senior who just lost a year’s worth of research data.

Toaster ovens get hot enough to ignite notebooks and loose papers they may come in contact with.

Hot plates—well, have you ever seen what happens to a saucepan if you allow the water to boil away? You may as well make sure your fire insurance premium is all paid up now.

Grounding prongs and polarized plugs (one wide blade, one narrow) can help to prevent shocks and electrocutions and prevent damage to your sensitive electronics. Never cut or trim the plug blades or the grounding prong. Doing so can result in severe injury to you and thousands of dollars of damage to your computer (or any equipment), leading to the electronic equivalent of “the dog ate my thesis.” In rooms with old-fashioned two-prong outlets, you may need to use adaptors. Read and follow the instructions that come with the adaptor.

Electrical safety is quite simple. (1) Treat anything that plugs in as if it were an employee with a grudge—willing to work, but awaiting its chance to zap you. (2) Liquid and electricity don’t mix: don’t introduce them. (3) Appliances which heat (toaster and microwave ovens, hotplates, hair dryers, popcorn poppers, irons, coffee makers) use more electricity and are more likely to cause overloads than things that don’t: if your school allows these, exercise special care. (4) Even a small motor in a fan or a mixer is probably stronger than your fingers: stop it and unplug it before you stick your hands in.

Many residence halls were built years ago, before every student arrived with a computer, CD player, microwave, refrigerator, wireless telephone, halogen study lamp, fan, and fax machine. Dorm wiring simply cannot handle the electrical load. And despite the tuition, your college isn’t made of money: wasting energy (average per year, ‘94–’98) _______________________ 570

Electrical safety isn’t an exciting topic... until something bad happens. Pictures of burning dorms always make the evening news. Tetanus and measles can be defeated with inoculations, but shock, electrocution, and fire can only be overcome by continuous vigilance. So, before you plug it in or turn it on, ask yourself:

Is the circuit overloaded? [Remove something from the circuit.]

Are the fuses or circuit breakers opening repeatedly? [This is a symptom of a serious problem. Turn everything off and have the appliances examined by a certified service person. Never tamper with the fuse or circuit breaker.]

Is the appliance cord getting hot? [Turn everything off and get a service person to look at the suspect product.]

Are there sparks when you turn something on? [Turn off, unplug, and get the item serviced.]

Does it meet the common sense rule? [If not, don’t do it.]

Are there frayed wires, exposed wires, or broken insulation anywhere? Broken plugs? [Throw away extension cords and have appliance cords replaced by someone trained to do it.]

Is the circuit overloaded? [Remove something from the circuit.]

Are the fuses or circuit breakers opening repeatedly? [This is a symptom of a serious problem. Turn everything off and have the appliances examined by a certified service person. Never tamper with the fuse or circuit breaker.]