



U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
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Manufacturers, Importers, Distributors, and Retailers of Extension Cords

Dear Ladies and Gentleman:

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is an independent federal regulatory agency responsible for protecting consumers from unreasonable risks of injury and death from consumer products. Our authority in this instance is set forth in the Consumer Product Safety Act (CPSA), 15 U.S.C. §§ 2051–2089.

I am writing this letter to urge you to make certain that indoor and outdoor extension cords (collectively “extension cords”) that you import, manufacture, distribute, or sell in the United States comply with the currently applicable voluntary safety standard, UL 817 (11th Edition – 2014 revision) – *Standard for Cord Sets and Power-Supply Cords* (the UL standard), which can be purchased from Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (www.ul.com).

Fires or electric shocks can occur, and families and individuals can be seriously injured or killed, if extension cords fail to contain one or more of the following:

- minimum wire size,
- sufficient strain relief,
- proper polarization,
- proper continuity,
- covers for outlets (indoor 2-wire parallel cords with polarized parallel-blade and parallel-slot fittings), or
- jacketed cords (outdoor cords).

Since 1987, these safety requirements have been addressed in the UL standard.

From 1980 through 1987, CPSC received reports of 374 deaths and 1,529 nonfatal fire or shock incidents involving extension cords.¹ This equates to an average of 47 deaths and 191 nonfatal incidents per year. Before 1979, the UL standard established requirements for:

¹ The numbers reflect incidents with extension cords that are within scope and addressable as it pertains to the topics in this letter.

- minimum wire size,
- sufficient strain relief,
- proper polarization, and
- jacketed outdoor extension cords.

Subsequently, the UL standard was strengthened between 1979 and 1987 by adding requirements for:

- minimum wire sizes smaller than 16 AWG to include overcurrent protection,
- covers for outlets (indoor 2-wire parallel cords with polarized parallel-blade and parallel-slot fittings), and
- proper continuity.

Since 1992, as consumers replaced older-design extension cords with extension cords that met the existing UL standard, CPSC data show a decrease in fatalities and incidents involving extension cords. The annual average number of deaths and nonfatal incidents dropped to approximately 25 deaths and 116 nonfatal incidents per year from 1992 to 2013. CPSC staff believes that the changes in the UL standard to incorporate the safety requirements listed above have contributed to the reduction in the number of injuries and deaths associated with extension cords.

Inasmuch as the UL standard has been in place for many years, the CPSC Office of Compliance and Field Operations staff considers indoor and outdoor extension cords that do not meet one or more of the safety provisions referenced above to be defective and to present a substantial product hazard under Section 15(a) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2064(a). Should the staff encounter such products, we may seek detention, seizure, destruction, and/or recall of these products.

For the reasons described above, you should not import, manufacture, distribute, or sell indoor and outdoor extension cords that do not meet the UL standard, especially because you are now on direct notice and have direct knowledge of our safety-related concerns, to the extent you were not directly knowledgeable already.

Accordingly, I urge you to review your product line immediately and ensure quickly that all indoor and outdoor extension cords that you manufacture, import, distribute, or sell in the United States are in compliance with the UL standard referenced above. CPSC staff will follow up, as appropriate, to ensure that firms are meeting their obligations in this area.

Section 15(b) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2064(b), requires every manufacturer, importer, distributor, and retailer of consumer products to report immediately to the Commission when it obtains information that reasonably supports the conclusion that a product distributed in commerce contains a defect that could create a substantial product hazard or creates an unreasonable risk of serious injury or death. The statute also provides for imposition of civil and criminal penalties for failing to report the required information. CPSC staff shall use all

available tools in furtherance of our efforts to ensure consumers are not placed at unreasonable risk of injury from hazardous products.

If you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance, you may contact Mary Kroh, CPSC Compliance Officer, at 301-504-7886 or mkroh@cpsc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc J. Schoem", followed by a long horizontal flourish line extending to the right.

Marc J. Schoem