Date: April 2, 2015

To: Campus Community

From: Marvin Pratt  
Director of Environmental Health and Safety

Subject: Extension Cords are a Serious Fire Safety Issue

Within the last 12-month period, campus has avoided two potentially catastrophic fires that could have been started by the inappropriate use of extension cords. In both cases, the University was fortunate that the failed extension cords were noticed/detected before damage to facilities occurred. The picture below shows the actual extension cords that failed in these incidents.

Extension cords are only to be used on a temporary basis. Both the Fire Code and the Electrical Code allow for extension cords in specific circumstances that are generally outlined below.

Extension cords, of proper size and according to their use, are permitted under the following conditions:

- For temporary use only, not to exceed 90 days.
- On non-heat producing devices (i.e. radios, computers, answering machines, etc.).
- Under specific and written authorization from EHS (for longer term use).
- Extension cords exist in one continuous length. Cords must not be connected (daisychained) or spliced together.
- As temporary wiring for holiday displays, artwork, or vendors at special events provided they meet the requirements above.
• A multi-plug extension cord that incorporates a surge protector and circuit breaker. This form of extension cord is recommended.

Extension cords are not permitted under the following conditions:

• Used as permanent wiring.
• For use on heat producing or high voltage devices such as heaters, coffee pots, high wattage lamps, refrigerators, microwave ovens, etc.
• Through doors, under doors, under carpets or rugs.
• A tripping hazard for normal foot traffic or emergency evacuation is created.
• Fire barriers or fire rated walls are breached to run the wiring unless the hole is properly fire-stopped and the wire properly enclosed in the appropriate conduit.
• The cord shows sign of wear, defects, bulging, exposed wire, or other damage.
• Located in corrosive areas or near any substance which would deteriorate the extension cord.

(Summary courtesy of UC Irvine)

Please immediately inspect your areas of responsibility for extension cords and remove them as necessary. Any cord, showing any damage or wear should be removed/replaced immediately. No equipment’s power needs overrule the safety of employees in the building, and the safety of the building itself.

If you need assistance in determining the appropriate use of extension cords, or any other safety issues, please contact EHS at your earliest convenience at 898-5126.