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Ask the electrician: How can I help prevent a fire in my commercial building? - by John Henry and Robert Shea

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As commercial electrical contractors, we understand the importance of fire safety in commercial buildings. A fire can have devastating consequences, both financially and emotionally. That's why it's crucial to implement proactive measures to prevent fires and minimize their potential damage.

In this article, we'll discuss key electrical safety practices, the importance of regular inspections, and the responsibilities of building managers in ensuring a fire-safe environment.

Electrical Safety: A Primary Concern

One of the most common causes of commercial building fires is electrical malfunctions. Overloaded circuits, loose connections, outdated wiring, and misuse of extension cords and space heaters are all common culprits. When too many electrical devices are plugged into a single circuit, it can become overloaded, generating excessive heat and potentially igniting a fire. Loose connections in electrical wiring can create sparks, which could ignite nearby flammable materials. Additionally, old wiring may be damaged or deteriorated, increasing the risk of electrical fires, and overloaded power strips with too many devices can cause them to overheat and start a fire.

Regular Inspections and Infrared Scans: Preventative Measures

To help prevent electrical fires, we recommend annual infrared scans and general electrical system inspections to identify potential hazards. Infrared scans can detect hot spots in electrical systems, which may indicate a developing issue. Taking these preventative measures will allow you to

address any issues before they become a problem.

Signs of Electrical Problems

If you notice excessive heat in electrical rooms, burning smells, frequent tripping breakers, flickering lights, or loose or damaged wiring, it's crucial to have your electrical system inspected. These are all indicators of potential electrical problems that should be addressed immediately to prevent further damage or safety hazards.

Building Manager Responsibilities

Building managers play a crucial role in preventing fires. Here are some preventative measures to consider:

- Limit the use of space heaters and extension cords: Excessive use of these devices can increase the risk of fire.
- Maintain clean and organized electrical rooms: Clutter and debris can create fire hazards.
- Ensure proper clearance around electrical panels: Adequate clearance is necessary to prevent overheating and fires.
- Conduct annual fire alarm and infrared scans: Regular inspections can help identify potential problems.
- Inspect junction boxes regularly: Be sure all junction boxes, outlets and switches are properly covered to reduce the risk of injury. Inspecting a junction box should only be done by a licensed electrician.

Emergency Preparedness

In case of a fire, it's essential to have emergency plans in place. This includes having emergency lights, exits, and power shutdowns clearly marked and accessible.

Enhanced Fire Safety

To enhance fire safety, employees should be well-versed in emergency procedures and promptly report any potential risks. Also make sure your equipment is UL certified. Regular maintenance of fire protection systems, such as sprinklers and alarms, is crucial. Adhering to local fire safety codes and regulations ensures compliance with industry standards.

By implementing these fire prevention measures, building owners can significantly reduce the risk of electrical fires and protect their properties and employees. Remember, prevention is key.

Don't wait for a fire to happen. Take proactive steps to ensure the safety of your commercial building. Contact a qualified electrical contractor to conduct a thorough inspection and recommend appropriate fire prevention measures.

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