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# Ground-Fault Protection on Construction Sites



U.S. Department of Labor  
Occupational Safety and Health Administration

OSHA 3007  
1998 (Revised)



This informational booklet is intended to provide a generic, non-exhaustive overview of a particular standards-related topic. This publication does not itself alter or determine compliance responsibilities, which are set forth in OSHA standards themselves and the *Occupational Safety and Health Act*. Moreover, because interpretations and enforcement policy may change over time, for additional guidance on OSHA compliance requirements, the reader should consult current and administrative interpretations and decisions by the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission and the Courts

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# Ground-Fault Protection on Construction Sites

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Occupational Safety and Health Administration  
Charles N. Jeffress, Assistant Secretary

OSHA 3007  
1998 (Revised)



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With the wide use of portable tools on construction sites, the use of flexible cords often becomes necessary. Hazards are created when cords, cord connectors, receptacles, and cord- and plug-connected equipment are improperly used and maintained. Generally, flexible cords are more vulnerable to damage than is fixed wiring. Flexible cords must be connected to devices and to fittings so as to prevent tension at joints and terminal screws. Because a cord is exposed, flexible and unsecured joints and terminals become more vulnerable. Flexible cord conductors are finely stranded for flexibility, but the strands of one conductor may loosen from under terminal screws and touch another conductor, especially if the cord is subjected to stress or strain.

A flexible cord may be damaged by activities on the job, by door or window edges, by staples or fastenings, by abrasion from adjacent materials, or simply by aging. If the electrical conductors become exposed, there is a danger of shocks, burns, or fire. A frequent hazard on a construction site is a cord assembly with improperly connected terminals.

Also, when a cord connector is wet, hazardous leakage can occur to the equipment grounding conductor and to humans who pick up that connector if they also provide a path to ground. Such leakage is not limited to the face of the connector but also develops at any wet portion of it.

When the leakage current of tools is below 1 ampere, and the grounding conductor has a low resistance, no shock should be perceived. However, should the resistance of the equipment grounding conductor increase, the current through the body also will increase. Thus, if the resistance of the equipment grounding conductor is significantly greater than 1 ohm, tools with even small leakages become hazardous.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) electrical standard for construction, title 29 *Code of Federal Regulations Part 1926, Subpart K*, contains the requirements for ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) and for assured equipment grounding conductor programs which are included in the Appendix of this booklet. These requirements will help reduce the number of injuries and accidents from electrical hazards. Work disruptions should be minor, and the necessary inspections and maintenance should require little time.

This booklet is intended to help employers and employees responsible for electrical equipment provide protection against 120-volt electrical hazards on the construction site—the most common being ground fault electrical shock—through the use of GFCIs or through the assured equipment grounding conductor program.

A GFCI is a fast-acting circuit breaker that senses small imbalances in the circuit caused by current leakage to ground and, in a fraction of a second, shuts off the electricity. The GFCI continually matches the amount of current going to an electrical device against the amount of current returning from the device along the electrical path. Whenever the amount “going” differs from the amount “returning” by approximately 5 milliamps, the GFCI interrupts the electric power within as little as 1/40 of a second. (See diagram.)

The GFCI, however, does not protect from line-to-line contact hazards—such as a worker holding two “hot” wires or a hot and a neutral wire in each hand. It protects against the most common form of electrical shock hazard—the ground fault, and protects against fires, overheating, and destruction of insulation on wiring.

GFCIs can be used successfully to reduce electrical hazards on construction sites. Tripping of GFCIs—interrupting current flow—is sometimes caused by wet connectors and tools. It is good practice to limit exposure of connectors and tools to excessive moisture by using watertight or sealable connectors.

Providing more GFCIs or shorter circuits can prevent tripping caused by the cumulative leakage from several tools or by leakages from extremely long circuits.

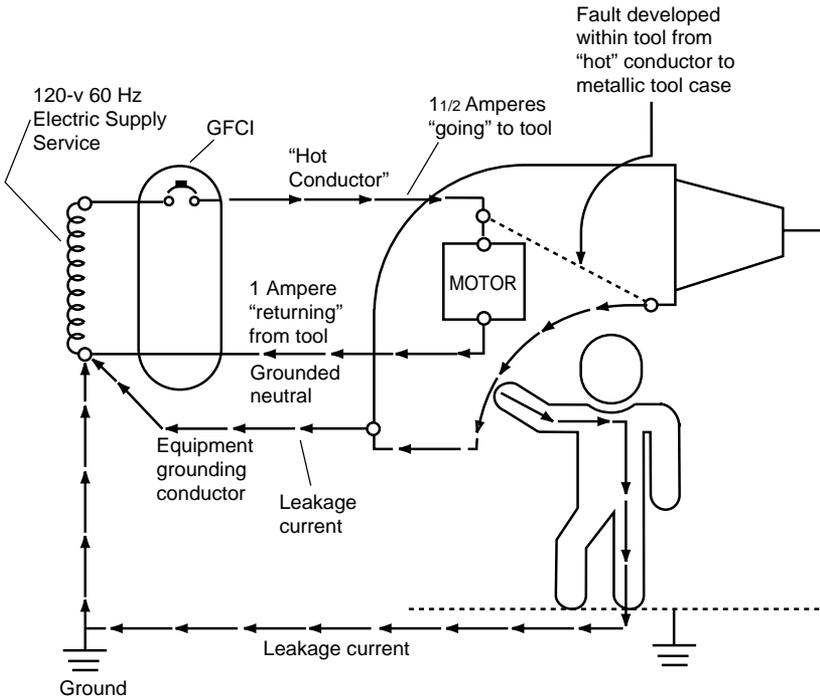
Insulation and grounding are two recognized means of preventing injury during electrical equipment operation. Conductor insulation may be provided by placing nonconductive material such as plastic around the conductor. Grounding may be achieved through the use of a direct connection to a known ground such as a metal, cold water pipe.

Consider, for example, the metal housing or enclosure around a motor or the metal box in which electrical switches, circuit breakers, and controls are placed. Such enclosures protect the equipment from dirt and moisture and prevent accidental contact with exposed wiring, however, there is a hazard associated with housings and enclosures. A malfunction within the equipment—such as deteriorated insulation—may create an electrical shock hazard. Many metal enclosures are connected to a ground to eliminate the hazard.

If a “hot” wire contacts a grounded enclosure, a ground fault results which normally will trip a circuit breaker or blow a fuse. Metal enclosures and containers are usually grounded by connecting them with a wire going to ground. This wire is called an equipment grounding conductor. Most portable electric tools and appliances are grounded by this means. There is one disadvantage to grounding: a break in the grounding system may occur without the user’s knowledge.

Insulation may be damaged by hard usage on the job or simply by aging. If this damage causes the conductors to become exposed, the hazards of shocks, burns, and fire will exist. Double insulation may be used as additional protection on the live parts of a tool, but double insulation does not provide protection against defective cords and plugs or against heavy moisture conditions.

## Ground-Fault Circuit Interrupter



GFCI monitors the difference in current flowing into the "hot" and out to the grounded neutral conductors. The difference ( $\frac{1}{2}$  ampere in this case) will flow back through any available path, such as the equipment grounding conductor, and through a person holding the tool, if the person is in contact with a grounded object.

OSHA ground-fault protection rules and regulations have been determined necessary and appropriate for employee safety and health. Therefore, it is the employer's responsibility to provide either: (a) GFCIs on construction sites for receptacle outlets in use and not part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure; or (b) a scheduled and recorded assured equipment grounding conductor program on construction sites, covering all cord sets, receptacles which are not part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure, and equipment connected by cord and plug which are available for use or used by employees.

The employer is required to provide approved GFCIs for all 120-volt, single-phase, 15- and 20-ampere receptacle outlets on construction sites that are not a part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure and that are in use by employees. If a receptacle or receptacles are installed as part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure and they are used for temporary electric power, GFCI protection shall be provided. Receptacles on the ends of extension cords are not part of the permanent wiring and, therefore the cord's receptacle, must be of the GFCI type whether or not the extension cord is plugged into permanent wiring. These GFCIs monitor the current-to-the-load for leakage to ground.

When this leakage exceeds 5 milliAmps plus or minus 1 milliAmp, the GFCI interrupts the current. They are rated to trip quickly enough to prevent electrocution. This protection is required in addition to, not as a substitute for, the grounding requirements of OSHA safety and health rules and regulations, 29 CFR 1926. The requirements which the employer must meet, if he or chooses the GFCI option, are stated in 29 CFR 1926.404(b)(1)(ii). (See appendix.)

The assured equipment grounding conductor program covers all cord sets, receptacles which are not a part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure, and equipment connected by cord and plug which are available for use or used by employees. The requirements which the program must meet are stated in 29 CFR 1926.404(b)(1)(iii), but employers may provide additional tests or procedures. (See Appendix.) OSHA requires that a written description of the employer's assured equipment grounding conductor program, including the specific procedures adopted, be kept at the jobsite. This program should outline the employer's specific procedures for the required equipment inspections, tests, and test schedule. The required tests must be recorded, and the record maintained until replaced by a more current record. The written program description and the recorded tests must be made available, at the jobsite, to OSHA and to any affected employee upon request. The employer is required to designate one or more **competent persons** to implement the program.

Electrical equipment noted in the assured equipment grounding conductor program must be visually inspected for damage or defects before each day's use. Any damaged or defective equipment must not be used by the employee until repaired.

Two tests are required by OSHA. One is a continuity test to ensure that the equipment grounding conductor is electrically continuous. It must be performed on all cord sets, receptacles which are not part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure, and on cord- and plug-connected equipment which is required to be grounded. This test may be performed using a simple continuity tester, such as a lamp and battery, a bell and battery, an ohmmeter, or a receptacle tester.

The other test must be performed on receptacles and plugs to ensure that the equipment grounding conductor is connected to its proper terminal. This test can be performed with the same equipment used in the first test.

These tests are required before first use, after any repairs, after damage is suspected to have occurred, and at 3-month intervals. Cord sets and receptacles which are essentially fixed and not exposed to damage must be tested at regular intervals not to exceed 6 months. Any equipment which fails to pass the required tests shall not be made available or used by employees.

## **Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines**

Effective management of worker safety and health protection is a decisive factor in reducing the extent and severity of work-related injuries and illnesses and their related costs. To assist employers and employees in developing effective safety and health programs, OSHA published recommended Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines (*Federal Register* 54 (18): 3908-3916, January 26, 1988). These voluntary guidelines apply to all places of employment covered by OSHA.

The guidelines identify four general elements that are critical to the development of a successful safety and health management program:

- Management commitment and employee involvement,
- Worksite analysis,
- Hazard prevention and control, and
- Safety and health training.

The guidelines recommend specific actions under each of these general elements to achieve an effective safety and health program. A single free copy of the guidelines can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor OSHA/OICA Publications, P.O. Box 37535, Washington, DC 20013-7535, by sending a self-addressed mailing label with your request.

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## **State Programs**

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970* encourages states to develop and operate their own job safety and health plans. States with plans approved under section 18(b) of the OSH Act must adopt standards and enforce requirements that are at least as effective as federal requirements. There are currently 25 state plan states: 23 of these states administer plans covering both private and public (state and local government) employees; the other states, Connecticut and New York, cover public sector employees only. OSHA-approved plan states must adopt safety and health standards comparable, but not necessarily identical to, the federal one within 6 months of a federal standard's promulgation. Until a state standard is promulgated,

OSHA provides interim enforcement assistance, as appropriate, in those states. A listing of approved state plan states appears at the end of this publication.

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## **Consultation Services**

Consultation assistance is available on request to employers who want help in establishing and maintaining a safe and healthful workplace. Largely funded by OSHA, the service is provided at no cost to the employer. Primarily developed for smaller employers with more hazardous operations, the consultation service is delivered by state government agencies or universities employing professional safety consultants and health consultants. Comprehensive assistance includes an appraisal of all mechanical, physical work practice, and environmental hazards of the workplace and all aspects of the employer's present job safety and health program.

The program is separate from OSHA's inspection efforts. No penalties are proposed or citations issued for any safety or health problems identified by the consultant. The service is confidential.

For more information concerning consultation assistance, see the list of consultation projects at the end of this publication.

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## **Voluntary Protection Programs**

Voluntary Protection Programs (VPPs) and onsite consultation services, when coupled with an effective enforcement program, expand worker protection to help meet the goals of the OSH Act. The three VPPs—Star, Merit, and Demonstration—are designed to recognize outstanding achievement by companies that have successfully incorporated comprehensive safety and health programs into their total management system. They motivate others to achieve excellent safety and health results in the same outstanding way, and they establish a cooperative relationship among employers, employees, and OSHA.

For additional information on VPPs and how to apply, contact the OSHA Area or Regional Office listed at the end of this publication.

## Training and Education

OSHA's area offices offer a variety of informational services, such as publications, audiovisual aids, technical advice, and speakers for special engagements.

OSHA's Training Institute in Des Plaines, IL., provides basic and advanced courses in safety and health for federal and state compliance officers, state consultants, federal agency personnel, and private sector employers, employees, and their representatives.

OSHA also provides funds to nonprofit organizations, through grants, to conduct workplace training and education in subjects where OSHA believes there is a lack of workplace training. Grants are awarded annually, with a 1-year renewal possible. Grant recipients are expected to contribute 20 percent of the total grant cost.

For more information on grants, training, and education, contact the OSHA Training Institute, Office of Training and Education, 1555 Times Drive, Des Plaines, IL 60018, (847) 297-4810, Fax (847) 297-4874. For further information on any OSHA program contact your nearest OSHA area or regional office listed at the end of this publication.

The OSHA Training Institute also has established OSHA Training Education Centers to address the increased demand for its courses from the private sector and from other Federal agencies. These centers are nonprofit colleges, universities, and other organizations that have been selected after a competition for participation in the program.

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## Electronic Information

Internet—OSHA standards, interpretations, directives, technical advisors, compliance assistance, and additional information are now on the World Wide Web at <http://www.osha.gov/>.

CD-ROM—A wide variety of OSHA materials, including standards, interpretations, directives, and more, can be purchased on CD-ROM from the U.S. Government Printing Office. To order, write to the Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954 or telephone (202) 512-1800. Specify OSHA Regulations, Documents, and Technical Information on CD-ROM

(ORDT), GPO Order No. S/N 729-013-00000-5. The price is \$43 per year (\$53.75 foreign); \$17 per single copy (\$21.25 foreign).

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## **Emergencies**

For life-threatening situations only, call (800) 321-OSHA. Complaints will go immediately to the nearest OSHA area or state office for help.

For further information on any OSHA program, contact your nearest OSHA area or regional office listed at the end of this publication.

**Employer Must Provide:**

- Written Description of Program
- Competent Person to Implement the Program
- Inspection and Testing
- Records of Test Results

**Inspections**

- **Frequency of Inspections:**
  - Before each day's use.
- **Visual inspection of the following equipment is required:**
  - Cord sets.
  - Cap, plug and receptacle of cord sets.
  - Equipment connected by cord and plug.
- **Exceptions:**
  - Receptacles and cord sets that are fixed and not exposed to damaged.

**Tests**

- **Frequency of tests:**
  - Before first use.
  - After repair and before placing back in service.
  - Before use after suspected damage.
  - Every 3-months except that cord sets and receptacles exposed to damage must be tested at regular intervals not to exceed 6 months.
- **Conduct tests for:**
  - Continuity of equipment of grounding conductor.
  - Proper terminal connection of equipment grounding conductor.

## 29 CFR Part 1926 Safety and Health Regulations for Construction Subpart K (Partial)

### § 1926.404 wiring design and protection.

#### (b) Branch circuits-(1) Ground-fault protection-(I) General.

The employer shall use either ground-fault circuit interrupters as specified in paragraph (b)(1)(ii) of this section or an assured equipment grounding conductor program as specified in paragraph (b)(1)(iii) of this section to protect employees on construction sites. These requirements are in addition to any other requirements for equipment grounding conductors.

**(ii) Ground-fault circuit interrupters.** All 120-volt, single-phase, 15- and 20-ampere receptacle outlets on construction sites, which are not a part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure and which are in use by employees, shall have approved ground-fault circuit interrupters for personnel protection. Receptacles on a two-wire, single-phase portable or vehicle-mounted generator rated not more than 5kW, where the circuit conductors of the generator are insulated from the generator frame and all other grounded surfaces, need not be protected with ground-fault circuit interrupters.

**(iii) Assured equipment grounding conductor program.** The employer shall establish and implement an assured equipment grounding conductor program on construction sites covering all cord sets, receptacles which are not a part of the building or structure, and equipment connected by cord and plug which are available for use or used by employees. This program shall comply with the following minimum requirements:

(A) A written description of the program, including the specific procedures adopted by the employer, shall be available at the jobsite for inspection and copying by the Assistant Secretary and any affected employee.

(B) The employer shall designate one or more competent persons (as defined in § 1926.32(f)) to implement the program.

(C) Each cord set, attachment cap, plug and receptacle of cord sets, and any equipment connected by cord and plug, except cord sets and receptacles which are fixed and not exposed to damage, shall be visually inspected before each day's use for external defects, such as deformed or missing pins or insulation

damage, and for indications of possible internal damage. Equipment found damaged or defective shall not be used until repaired.

(D) The following tests shall be performed on all cord sets, receptacles which are not a part of the permanent wiring of the building or structure, and cord-and plug-connected equipment required to be grounded:

(1) All equipment grounding conductors shall be tested for continuity and shall be electrically continuous.

(2) Each receptacle and attachment cap or plug shall be tested for correct attachment of the equipment grounding conductor. The equipment grounding conductor shall be connected to its proper terminal.

(E) All required tests shall be performed:

(1) Before first use;

(2) Before equipment is returned to service following any repairs;

(3) Before equipment is used after any incident which can be reasonably suspected to have caused damage (for example, when a cord set is run over); and

(4) At intervals not to exceed 3 months, except that cord sets and receptacles which are fixed and not exposed to damage shall be tested at intervals not exceeding 6 months.

(F) The employer shall not make available or permit the use by employees of any equipment which has not met the requirements of paragraph (b)(1)(iii) of this section.

(G) Tests performed as required in this paragraph shall be recorded. This test record shall identify each receptacle, cord set, and cord- and plug-connected equipment that passed the test and shall indicate the last date it was tested or the interval for which it was tested. This record shall be kept by means of logs, color coding, or other effective means and shall be maintained until replaced by a more current record. The record shall be made available on the jobsite for inspection by the Assistant Secretary and any affected employee.

*All About OSHA* – OSHA 2056

*Code of Federal Regulations – Title 29, Part 1910, Subpart S and Part 1926, Subpart K*

*Construction Industry* – OSHA 2207

*Consultation Services for the Employer* – OSHA 3047

*Controlling Electrical Hazards* – OSHA 3075

*Electrical Standards for Construction* – OSHA 3097

*Employer Rights and Responsibilities Following an OSHA Inspection* – OSHA 3000

*Hand and Power Tools* – OSHA 3080

*OSHA: Employee Workplace Rights* – OSHA 3021

*OSHA Inspections* – OSHA 2098

*Personal Protective Equipment* – OSHA 3077

*Underground Construction (Tunneling)* – OSHA 3115

Single free copies of the above publications can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA/OICA Publications, P.O. Box 37535, Washington, DC 20013-7535. Send a self-addressed mailing label with your request.

The following publications may be ordered at cost, from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington DC 20402, (202) 512-1800. Include GPO Order No. And make checks payable to Superintendent of Documents.

*Code of Federal Regulations – Title 29, Part 1926*

*Construction (OSHA)* (\$31) (\$38.50 Foreign).

Order No. S/N 869-032-00107-3.

*OSHA Safety and Health Standards (29 CFR 1910.1000 to End)*

(\$29) (Foreign \$36.25) Order No. S/N 869-032-00105-7.

*Controlling Electrical Hazards* – OSHA 3075 (\$1)

Order No. 029-016-00126-3.

*Handbook for Small Business* – OSHA 2209 (\$6.50)

Order No. 029-016-00176-0.

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Industrial Commission  
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