

Ground-Fault Protection on Construction Sites



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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.

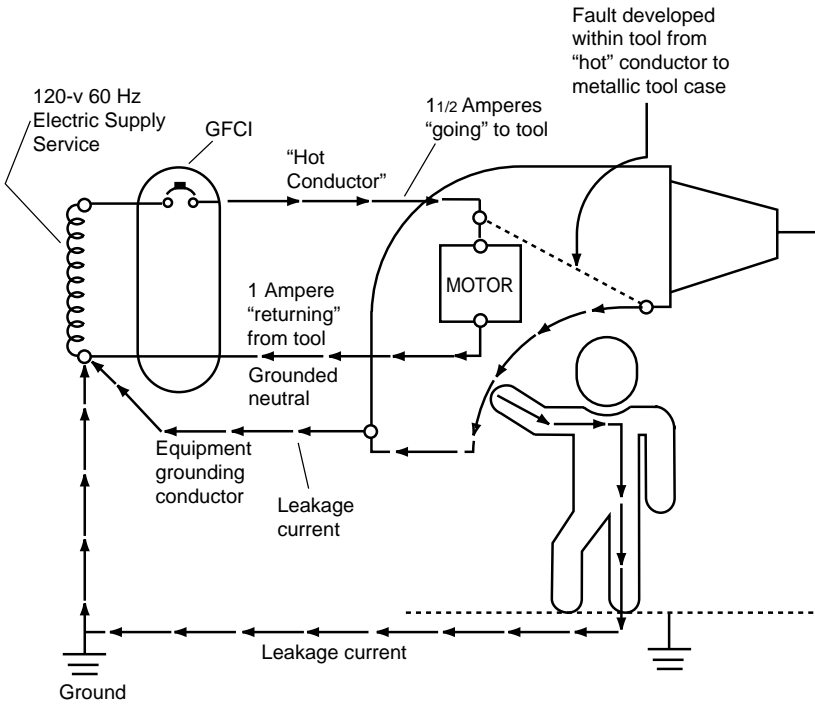
Insulation and grounding are two recognized means of preventing injury during electrical equipment operation. Conductor insulation may be provided by placing nonconductive material such as plastic around the conductor. Grounding may be achieved through the use of a direct connection to a known ground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

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.