Power Strips in Long Term Care Facilities
Recently, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced (S&C memo 14-46) that it will permit a categorical waiver to allow for use of power strips in resident care areas that use line-operated, patient-care-related electrical equipment in both new and existing healthcare facilities if the provider is in compliance with applicable 2012 Life Safety Code (LSC) power strip requirements and with the 1999 NFPA 99 and 2000 LSC electrical system and equipment provisions. These provisions, however, rarely apply to long-term care facilities because most do not have "line-operated, patient-care related electrical equipment" except for possibly life support equipment.

The use of power strips and multiple plug adaptors is increasing in healthcare facilities as residents are using more and more electrical devices. Power strips are designed for use for devices that draw low-powered loads such as computers, audio and video equipment, clocks, lighting, etc. They are not intended for use with high load equipment such as refrigerators, coffee pots, space heaters, microwave ovens, toaster, toaster ovens, fans and shop equipment. Nor are power strips ever to be used with medical equipment such as ventilators, concentrators, tube feeding and IV equipment, suction machines, low-loss air mattresses and like equipment. The recent S&C memo does not change the 2007 CMS opinion, which stated that for the use of power strips in healthcare occupancies:

Power strips may not be used as a substitute for adequate electrical outlets in a facility. Power strips may be used for a computer, monitor, and printer. Power strips are not designed to be used with medical devices in patient care areas. Precautions needed if power strips are used include: installing internal ground fault and over-current protection devices; preventing cords from becoming tripping hazards; and using power strips that are adequate for the number and types of devices used.

CMS did spell out further in S&C Memo 14-46 that, "Resident rooms in long-term care or other residential care facilities that do not use line-operated electrical appliances for diagnostic, therapeutic, or monitoring purposes are not subject to the more restrictive NFPA 99 requirements regarding the use of power strips in patient care areas/rooms.". The basic requirements for long term care facilities are:

1) Precautions as required by the LSC and reference documents include but are not limited to:

- Installing internal ground fault and over-current protection devices.
- Preventing cords from becoming tripping hazards.
- Connecting devices so that tension is not transmitted to joints or terminals.
- No "daisy chaining."
- Using power strips adequate for the number and types of devices.
- No overloading power strips with high load devices. In addition, use of ground fault circuit interruption (GFCIs) may be required in locations near water sources to prevent electrocution.

2) Power strips providing power to non-patient-care-related electrical equipment must be Relocatable Power Taps (RPT) listed as UL 1363. According to the 1363 UL, installation instructions for relocatable power taps includes:

- Intended to be directly connected to a permanently installed receptacle;
- Not intended to be series connected (daisy chained) to other relocatable power taps or to extension cords;
- Not intended for use at construction sites and similar locations;
- Not intended to be permanently secured to building structures, tables, work benches or similar structures, nor are they intended to be used as a substitute for fixed wiring; and
- The cords are not intended to be routed through walls, windows, ceilings, floors or similar openings.