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Death of a 14-year-old boy from electrocution

Chatham, Ontario, August 24, 1998 — Dr. Thomas Wilson, Southwestern Regional Coroner and Ross Sutherland, Technical Advisor for Ontario Hydro Electrical Inspection, Western Territory Office in London, today released details of preliminary findings from their investigation into the death of 14-year-old Freddy Jewel. Freddy died July 20, 1998, after he was electrocuted while operating a personal computer at his home in Dresden.

The computer, which had a three-pin plug, was plugged into an unapproved power bar. The ground pin of the power bar's plug had been broken off so it would fit into the home's two pin receptacles. The receptacles in this home had been installed at some time in the past when two pin receptacles were the residential standard. The power bar had an internal manufacturing defect which allowed the computer to operate normally, while at the same time energizing the metal in the computer at 120 volts. The internal defect in the power bar would not have caused problems if the circuit had been protected with a proper ground connection. Freddy was electrocuted when he touched a metallic part on the computer.

A tragedy like Freddy Jewel's death can be avoided if people remember the following advice:

1. Do not remove the third pin on plugs connected to equipment.
 2. Always use equipment clearly marked as approved for use in Ontario. For a complete list of recognized marks see the ESA web site www.esasafe.com under Electrical Product Safety tab.
 3. Older homes with receptacles that do not accept three-pin plugs but require them, should have grounded receptacles or Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) receptacles which accept three-pin plugs installed by a certified electrician or licensed electrical contractor.
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