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Is Your Home Safe?

Accepting AFCIs and Understanding the 2008 National Electrical Code Changes

Arlington, VA – Improper installation of electrical wiring, damaged or deteriorated wires and cords are associated with more than 73,500 residential fires each year. A significant portion of these fires are caused from unintended electrical arcs which can occur behind walls at outlets and switches. These arcing faults can take place instantaneously or build up over several years.

In an effort to reduce electrical fires in the home, manufacturers have developed arc fault circuit interrupter's (AFCIs). AFCIs should not be confused with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). While both AFCIs and GFCIs are important electrical safety devices, they have different functions. GFCIs were designed to help prevent electric shocks while AFCIs were designed to protect against fires caused by arcing faults.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) is working to educate consumers on AFCI technology because of their effectiveness in preventing electrical fires. "Use of new AFCI technology could prevent 50 to 75 percent of these fires, saving hundreds of lives, reducing thousands of injuries and nearly \$1 billion in property damage annually," noted Brett Brenner, president of ESFI.

This November, the most recent edition to the National Electrical Code (2008) will be released requiring installation of AFCIs for new construction. The installation of AFCIs will provide a higher level of protection than a standard circuit breaker by detecting and removing the arcing condition before it becomes a fire hazard.

Arc faults do not necessarily create a sustained short circuit that causes a traditional circuit breaker to trip or a fuse to blow, but can result in hot spots in wiring that can lead to a fire. AFCIs recognize the unique signature of harmful arcs and shut off the circuit to prevent a fire hazard.

Hidden electrical fires can spread quickly, delaying detection by smoke alarms. While from a homeowner's perspective any improvement is an additional or unplanned expense, ESFI encourages you to consider enhancing the protection of your electrical system with the installation of AFCIs on all general purpose circuits throughout your home.

ESFI strongly urges your county representative and code officials to adopt the most recent code to help make your community safer. To make this recommendation to your county official call _____.

ESFI reminds everyone that electricity is a powerful tool. It can also be a lethal hazard. Better safety standards have reduced electrical hazards that cause deaths, injuries and property damage. But good safety habits are still the best prevention against electrical hazards.

For additional electrical safety information, visit the Foundation's Web site at www.electrical-safety.org or call 703-841-3229.

Founded in 1994 through a joint effort between Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL), the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA), the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) is North America's only non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety in the home and workplace.