



As Homes Age Electrical Fires Increase

Older Homes at Greater Risk of Electrical Fire

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Arlington, VA – Hazards commonly found in older homes are increasingly causing fires and fatalities in the United States. Home electrical problems account for nearly 55,000 home fires every year. These fires cause over 500 deaths, injure more than 1,400 people, and account for \$1.4 billion in property damage. Older homes are at even greater risk of fire. A report released today by the Fire Protection Research Foundation highlights the fact that aging homes in the United States can be protected by taking a few simple steps and by bringing electrical components up to date.

The report closely examined the electrical systems of 30 older homes in the U.S. – documenting potentially hazardous conditions in those homes. The study showed that real dangers can exist and often remain hidden in the electrical systems of older homes. The vast majority of those hazards were caused by improper installation and maintenance and a failure to meet proven safety provisions found in the *National Electrical Code*® (*NEC*®). Some of the specific problems identified in the report included poorly done electrical repairs, worn out wiring devices, and misuse of extension cords.

The potential for hazardous electrical conditions is increasing as Americans put more and more of a burden on the electrical systems in older homes. According to the US Census Bureau, half of the homes in the United States were built before 1973. These homes and electrical systems were built before many of the appliances and electronics that we use today became common. This includes more than a third of U.S. homes which were built before hair dryers or electric can openers were even invented.

“As each year goes by Americans are using more energy in their homes,” says Brett Brenner, president of the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). “Many homes and electrical systems in the U.S. are simply being overburdened leading to fires, deaths, and injuries.”

As a result of the report, the Foundation strongly encourages homeowners to have their homes’ electrical systems thoroughly inspected by qualified electricians, ensuring that all electrical work in the home meets the safety provisions in the *NEC*®.

“When people buy a home, they have no idea what kind of electrical work has been done in the past or if that work was done by someone qualified to perform the task,” notes Brenner. “But today’s report clearly found that Americans can take steps to prevent many of these electrical fires from occurring.”

This month, ESFI is providing consumers with a checklist which will allow consumers to identify electrical dangers commonly found in each room of their home. ESFI will also be educating owners of older homes on newer fire prevention technology such as Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs). These advanced electronic circuit breakers detect dangerous conditions in a home’s wiring and cut off power to the circuit before a fire develops.

The complete Fire Protection Research Foundation’s report can be found at www.homewiringsafety.com. To learn more about ESFI and electrical safety in older homes, visit www.electrical-safety.org.

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