



Fact Sheet: Know the Dangers in Your Older Home

More than 30 million homes – or about one-third of the homes in the United States – are at least 50 years old. Today we have come to expect more from our homes than ever before, and many older home electrical systems are simply being overburdened. Fortunately, many of the dangers associated with these systems can be prevented simply by upgrading your home's electrical panel.

Today, more homeowners are tackling do-it-yourself projects than ever before. But sometimes, their enthusiasm is accompanied by a lack of understanding of the inherent risks introduced by electricity.

As Americans continue to expect more from their electrical systems, home improvements and repairs will be essential. If you own an older home, it is particularly important for to take an active role in understanding the condition of their current electrical system, its capacity, limitations, and potential hazards.

Facts and Statistics

Each year, hundreds of people in the United States are critically injured and electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes.

- Fire departments responded to 414,000 home fires in the United States in 2007. These fires caused 2,895 civilian fatalities, 14,000 injuries, and \$7.5 billion in property damage (NFPA).
- Home electrical fires account for an estimated 53,000 fires each year, causing more than 500 deaths, 1,400 injuries, and \$1.4 billion in property damage.
- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one-half of the homes in the United States were built before 1973.
- Electrical arcing is the source of ignition in more than 37,000 fires annually, causing hundreds injuries and deaths as well as \$750 in direct property damage (NFPA).
- Every year, nearly 2,400 children are injured by inserting objects such as keys or hairpins into electrical outlets – an average of seven children per day.
- Electrical fires caused by aging wiring; misuse of surge suppressors and extension cords; and electrocution caused by power lines, wiring systems and large appliances are the top electrical safety hazards.
- The average life span of a home in the U.S. is increasing. At the same time, average monthly consumption of energy has increased from 830 kWh in 1993 to 920 kWh in 2006.

Electrical Safety Devices

Most shocks and fires from electrical systems can be prevented by updating your home with new technology that offers enhanced protection for your family and your home:

- **Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs):** Devices that replace standard circuit breakers in the electrical service panel. AFCIs offer enhanced fire protection by detecting arc faults and shutting down power to a circuit in milliseconds.
- **Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs):** These specialized outlets offer the best protection available against electric shock and electrocution. Found mostly in areas where electrical products might come into contact with water, GFCIs detect even the slightest variations in leakage current flowing through a circuit and immediately shut off power.
- **Tamper-Resistant Outlets (TROs):** These standard wall outlets feature an internal shutter mechanism that prevents children from sticking objects like hairpins, keys, and paperclips into the receptacle.