

AFCIs add protection against electrical fires

Homeowners now have a new defense against electrical fires beyond conventional fuses and circuit breakers. Arc fault circuit interrupters are now available to homeowners looking for more protection from fires.

The 1999 National Electric Code requires AFCIs on all branch circuits servicing bedrooms in new construction after Jan. 1, 2001, but it's been my experience that many local communities still don't require them yet.

HOW AFCI WORKS

AFCIs replace regular circuit breakers in your home's electrical panel. They have a computer chip that monitors the electrical flow. When the AFCI recognizes an arc fault, it shuts down the flow in a fraction of a second.

Where a ground fault interrupter (GFI) protects you from a shock, an AFCI protects your house from a fire.

Normally, when a hot wire makes contact with ground or a neutral wire, there is enough current draw in the circuit to trip the breaker or blow a fuse. Problems can arise when this contact is not solid or intermittent, and then, an arc (or spark) develops which could cause a fire.

Arca most often occur when the insulation on wires breaks down. This allows a wire to be exposed to another wire or a ground source.

Sometimes this will happen when a heavy object is set on a cord in such a way that it damages the insulation. More often wire insulation is compromised between walls or floors, often

by animals chewing on the wires or other physical damage. These out-of-sight arcs are the most dangerous.

If you have never installed a circuit breaker, this is no place to learn. Even when you were to shut the main breaker off, there is still live current in the panel box and the amperage is far more than enough the kill you.

Do you need them? According to the National Fire Protection Association, about 40 percent of home fires are caused by eroded wire insulation. The protection normally afforded by traditional fuses, circuit breakers or GFIs will not protect against arc-induced fires. This amounts to numerous injuries, lost property and more important, lives.

Can you install one? I'll answer this with a very qualified yes, but only if you're confident with advanced electric work. If you have never installed a circuit breaker, this is no place to learn. Even when you were to shut the main breaker off, there is still live current in the panel box and the amperage is far more than enough the kill you.

Seek the help of an experienced person or hire an electrician.

Harry Jachym writes Ask Dad, a column on home issues ranging from repairs and maintenance to building and remodeling projects. He is a Plymouth resident. Send any questions or comments to Jachym at askdad@comcast.net or in care of Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Know which receipts you should keep

Q: I try to keep my receipts from purchases, but am amazed at how much paper that is. What do I need to keep and what can I toss?

A: Paper clutter accumulates faster than dust bunnies! Your goal is to keep receipts for items you may need to return, major purchases, and purchases you charged.



Domestic Planner
Diana Koenig

The important thing to remember is to set up a system that works for you and then work at it.

Keep these receipts for items you may need to return: Receipts for items you are sure you don't have to return any of the objects. This works well for clothing receipts and household items.

Periodically go through your billfold and discard receipts you no longer need. If you

accumulate too many for your billfold, use an envelope labeled Return Receipts.

Receipts for items rarely returned: Keep receipts for things like groceries and dry cleaning for a short period of time. You may need to return a grocery item or take back dry cleaning that wasn't properly cleaned. You may then discard these receipts if you don't need them for tax purposes.

If you get a receipt for renting movies, keep it as a reminder for when the movie needs to be returned - and then discard it when you return the movie.

If you don't know whether you should keep a receipt or not, ask yourself: Why would you want to refer to it in the future?

If you want to remember the business for a later visit, put the information in your calendar or planner and discard the receipt. If you want to save a receipt for a special event, put it with your mementos or scrapbooking items.

Receipts for big purchases:

When you make a big purchase like a refrigerator, TV or stereo, you need to save the receipt for future warranty work.

For a TV or stereo equipment, you can place the receipt in an envelope and tape the envelope to either the owner's manual or underneath the equipment.

You can also make household files labeled Furniture, Kitchen, Electronics, Bikes, Cameras, etc. and use these to hold the owner's manuals and receipts.

If you buy tires for your car, place the receipt in your glove box. You will need it in your car if something happens to your tires.

Charge receipts: If you charge items on a credit card, at the time of purchase put the receipt in your billfold. (When I leave the receipt in the bag, I end up discarding the receipt when I am done with the bag!)

When I get home, I move these receipts to a container like a clear plastic shoe box. When you get your credit card bill, check the bill with the receipts.

If this seems like too much trouble, save the receipts, review your bill and only check the receipts when something looks wrong.

When the container gets full, discard the oldest. If your receipts have your credit card number on them, you need to tear them up or shred them before you throw them away.

Gift receipts: You may want a special envelope or container just for your gift receipts, especially during the holiday season.

This way you can provide the receipt if an item needs to be returned.

You can use these receipts to keep track of your budget for each person on your gift list.

Today's Refrigerator Bulletin: Organize your receipts for easy store returns, budget planning, and taxes!

Diana Koenig is a writer, educator, speaker, consultant, and president of Domestic Planner® Direct Sales Company. Send your questions and success stories to: Diana Koenig, P.O. Box 1702, Manchester, MD 63011, e-mail diana.koenig@hotmail.com. Visit www.domesticplanner.com.

Ideas for home decor served along with brunch

BY MARY KLEIMIC
STAFF WRITER

Visitors to Orchestration for the Home at Michigan Design Center in Troy could find ideas for getting in tune with new decor around the home, whether for a whole room or just a table setting.

The event, which took place over the weekend, featured vignettes by area interior designers in showrooms at MDCC, along with presentations by designers, architects, landscape architects and garden and floral artists, and talks by internationally renowned guest speakers.

Among the latter was Alexa

Hampton, president of Mark Hampton Inc., a firm founded by her father.

Alexa Hampton, who will offer her own fabric line, has made the top 100 designers list of Architectural Digest and House Beautiful. She spoke at a brunch Sunday.

Hampton lives with her husband in a 1,100-square-foot apartment.

The bedroom features pale blue walls. Hampton suggested anchoring a soft color such as this "with lots of dark mahogany."

"It makes it less gender-specific," she said.

Hampton decorated a house in tones of off-white so

the architecture wouldn't be overwhelmed with color.

"Because of the fantastic architecture, there was less of a need to go overboard with decorating," she said.

On another project, she centered a tall statue in front of a door (allowing space so the door could open), making the casing of the door serve as a frame for the art work.

Other ideas and tips Hampton presented:

The same shade could look different in one part of the country than it did in another. Hampton had the experience of selecting a blue paint in New York that to her surprise looked steel gray at

the client's house in Florida.

Paint a sisal rug to resemble an Aubusson rug. Sisal is stronger.

To make short windows appear taller, hang curtains from the ceiling molding and put balloon curtains at the top of the windows. It will give the impression that the window is longer.

The centerpiece at each table at the brunch consisted of a round, clear glass vase holding Granny Smith apples and calla lilies, their stems trimmed so the flowers were slightly above the rim.

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PET OF THE WEEK

Daisy is in a serious situation. She needs a place to stay even if it's just for a few days or weeks. Daisy is a very affectionate 4-year-old greyhound rescued from a race-track and she needs a permanent or at least a foster home. This sweet dog would be happy in a home where she can spend her days curled up by the side of a senior citizen, an adult who lives alone or a couple without kids. She doesn't like other animals or kids but she is friendly and affectionate. She's a couch potato who literally likes to watch television - especially nature channels. When she's outdoors she likes to play. If you can adopt or foster this housebroken, healthy dog please call REGAP soon at (248) 373-0308 or visit www.rescuedgreyhounds.org

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