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Editorial

OUR VIEWS

Give us a break

The argument from some representatives of North Carolina homebuilders against requiring an electrical safety device in new homes is weak, and smacks of a special interest group lobbying to oppose something just because it represents more regulation.

In this case, a rule approved by the state Building Code Council, a panel appointed by the governor, is up for review — a review commanded by the legislature. What “review” means here is that homebuilders are trying to get the rule abandoned.

Why? Because the device, called an arc fault circuit interrupter, which detects small fluctuations in electrical current, would add a relative few dollars to the cost of a new home. The devices retail for between \$30 and \$55. Opponents say that, combined with the cost of meeting other building code requirements, putting

in the devices would add \$1,000 to the cost of some homes. They say the circuit interrupters are not necessary given modern building codes, and that the devices already are required in the bedrooms of new houses.

But to use one statistic from a News & Observer report, Charlotte fire officials identified 379 fires that might have been prevented by the devices using information from 2005 to 2008.

The devices, when they detect a small fluctuation in current, cut voltage to a frayed wire before a fire is started. Builders apparently used the cost-increase argument with some success with lawmakers, all in the name of making homes more affordable, but that argument is weak when the cost is figured over the life of a mortgage.

The council should stick by the rule. Safety wins the day.