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New Home Safety Measure That Saves Lives and Property From Electrical Fires Now Available

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20070628/AQTHFNS1)

A new and potentially life-saving technology, called an arc fault circuit interrupter, or AFCI for short, has the potential to do just that-make homes and families across the country significantly safer from the threat of electrical fires, according to the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA).

Available in hardware stores and home centers, AFCIs are an advanced form of circuit breaker developed in response to an identified electrical problem responsible for fires in the home. While working smoke alarms and fire extinguishers are proven methods to help families escape quickly and safely from a fire, AFCIs actually prevent some electrical fires from igniting in the first place by shutting off the electrical circuit once a threat of fire is detected.

"Homeowner safety must be the number-one priority in new home construction, and education about added safety measures a family can take is the first step in saving lives and property," said Gerard Winstanley, AFCI expert for NEMA. "Electrical fires cause an estimated 485 deaths and injure 2,300 more individuals annually, but this doesn't have to happen."

According to Winstanley, AFCI circuit breakers provide maximum protection to the home's electrical system, and he encourages homeowners to ask their new home builders about having AFCIs installed.

Other experts agree. The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission estimates that AFCIs could prevent more than 50 percent of electrical fires, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development lists the technology as a key device in preventing burns and fire-related injuries.

In fact, the technology may soon gain widespread use. In June, the National Fire Protection Association approved the next edition of the National Electrical Code(R), which makes AFCIs a requirement in circuits throughout new homes. AFCIs were previously only required in bedroom circuits, but the NEC(R) is taking homeowner safety a step further - having realized the technology's tremendous potential.

The requirement takes effect January 1, 2008, but that shouldn't stop homeowners from adopting the technology now. Safety measures that save lives and property from the damaging effects of electrical fires should not be ignored.

With this in mind, NEMA's Low Voltage Distribution Equipment Section recently launched http://www.AFCIsafety.org, an online resource devoted to helping homeowners learn more about this important

safety measure. Visitors can view a comprehensive Q&A and download brochures and other educational materials that highlight the technology's safety benefits and the overall impact it will have on decreasing the devastation and heartache caused by electrical fires.

How do AFCIs work?

AFCIs provide increased protection over conventional circuit breakers by detecting a condition known as an "arc fault." Unlike a conventional circuit breaker, which detects overloads and short circuits, an AFCI uses advanced electronic technology to sense different arcing conditions. An arc fault can exceed 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit, resulting in burning particles that can easily ignite surrounding material, such as wood framing or insulation. AFCIs automatically shut the circuit down when these conditions occur-before they become a fire hazard.

AFCIs can be found in home centers and hardware stores nationwide and are a wise investment offering immediate protection from electrical fires. For more information, visit http://www.AFCIsafety.org.

SOURCE National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA)