

## **State will require electronic breakers all through houses**

**Ben Niolet, News & Observer**

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New homes will have to be built with an electronic switch designed to prevent electrical fires after a state agency halted an effort to scale back use of the devices.

For nearly a year, the Building Code Council, which sets minimum building standards, had moved toward rescinding a requirement that arc fault circuit interrupters be installed for all living areas in new homes. The breakers were already required for bedrooms.

On Friday, Gov. Beverly Perdue, who appoints council members, sent a letter expressing her support for keeping the code requirement that they be installed in all living areas of a house. Her letter apparently changed minds.

On Tuesday, the council unanimously decided to keep the requirement in place.

"You pick your battles," said Mack Nixon, an Albemarle builder and member of the council who has opposed expanding the use of the devices.

Nixon said he still believes the devices aren't worth the extra cost, which homebuilders will pass along to buyers. The breakers cost \$30 to \$35 at retail versus \$5 or \$6 for standard breakers, and opponents of the devices, primarily homebuilders, say the added expense doesn't justify what they say is a marginal benefit.

Kim Reitterer, a Charlotte electrical engineer and council member who has been a vocal supporter of the devices, said the governor's letter likely reversed the council's intention to roll back use of the breakers.

The breakers electronically sense fluctuations that could be a sign that electrical current is slowly leaking, possibly through an exposed wire. If the current continues to leak, heat can build until a fire starts.

Opponents say the devices can sometimes trip for no reason and such nuisances could lead homeowners to swap them out for standard breakers. But Perdue said in her letter that the devices were worth whatever downsides they had.

"The real benefits of fires prevented and injuries and deaths averted do outweigh the incremental cost and the occasional nuisance tripping," Perdue wrote in her letter.

Safety advocates praised the council's decision.

Homebuilders are overstating the drawbacks, said Brett Brenner, president of the Electrical Safety Foundation International, a Rosslyn, Va.,-based nonprofit organization financed in part by electrical manufacturers.

"It really, to me, is a no-brainer," he said. "It just makes sense."

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