

Editorial: Faulty act by building council

Wednesday, December 10

Starting in January, new houses built in North Carolina will have extra protection against fire. The state building code will require most rooms in new houses to be equipped with a special kind of circuit breaker. Called an arc fault circuit interrupter, the device trips if it detects erratic current fluctuations in wiring.

But that added protection for new construction might only be temporary. At its Tuesday meeting in Raleigh, the N.C. Building Code Council voted to re-examine its previous decision to require these circuits. It will consider an amendment to keep the code the way it has been — requiring the circuits only in bedrooms.

Some home-builders don't like AFCIs because they think they're too costly. One builder said the new code could add \$1,000 to the price of a 3,000-square-foot house. Builders argue that the extra protection isn't necessary.

It's reasonable for builders to want to keep a lid on construction costs, especially in this economy. But it's faulty reasoning for them to suggest that doing away with the code upgrade is a good way to save money.

Arcing faults are a major cause of the more than 40,000 home wiring fires that happen annually in the United States. What new homeowner wouldn't want to pay a little more up front to prevent a fire that could prove deadly?

And if the devices aren't necessary, then why does the National Electrical Code require them? And why are fire chiefs, such as Greensboro's David Douglas, strong supporters of houses having them?

The \$1,000 figure also may be exaggerated. AFCIs usually run between \$30 and \$55. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates it would cost less than two-thousandths of the cost of a median-priced house to add a dozen such devices to it.

What's needed is some high-wattage protest to the N.C. Building Council for even considering back-tracking. You can do that by writing to the N.C. Department of Insurance, Attention: Chris Noles, 1202 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1202. (Phone: 919-661-5880). Tell him to short circuit the amendment.