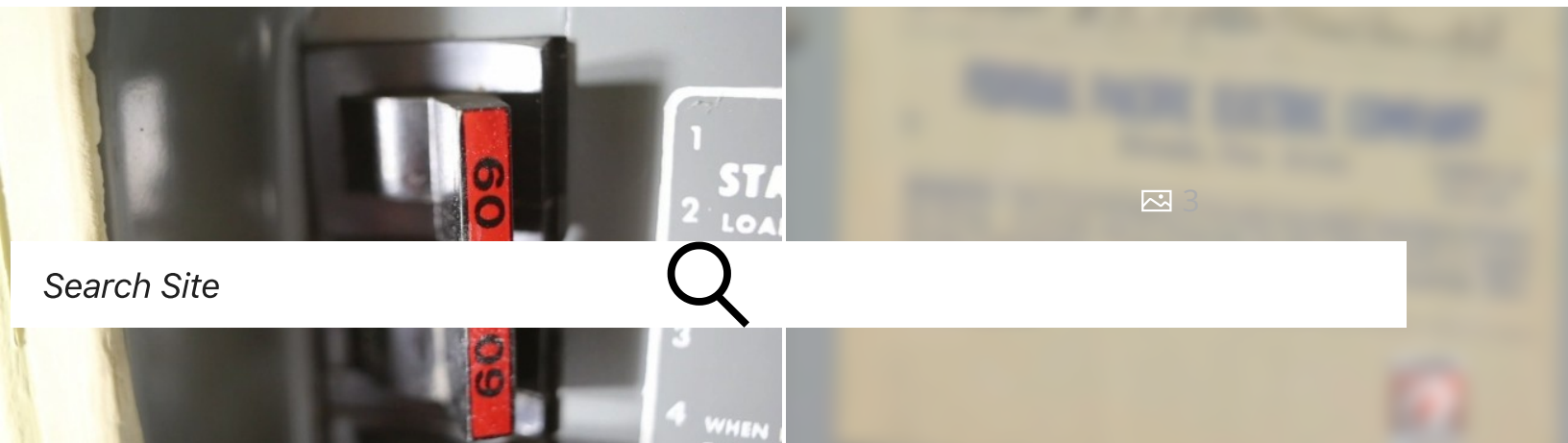


# Consumer Alert: Hazard in your home

by WKRC  
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CINCINNATI (Kurt Ludlow/WKRC) - The circuit breakers in your electric panel are supposed to stop fires, not start them.

But millions of families across the country and in the Tri-State are living in homes with potentially defective breakers. These breakers are in homes between 25 and 60 years old. When too much electric current is fed to a defective circuit breaker there can be sparks, smoke, flame, heat; everything necessary to start a fire.

Steve Turner was the electrician Kurt Ludlow hired to troubleshoot a tripping breaker. As soon as Turner identified the panel, he said it needed to be replaced.



What makes the Federal Pacific bad? "Sometimes breakers don't trip when the circuit is overloaded," explained Turner.

Federal Pacific Stab-Lok electric panels were installed in homes nationwide from the mid-50's to the 1980's. A New Jersey court found that Federal Pacific Electric committed testing fraud, claiming circuit breakers met underwriters laboratories standards when they knew they were

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Federal Pacific has been out of business for many years. And electricians nationwide have been dealing with the problem ever since. Electrician Bob Smith said Federal Pacific Stablok

"Not all of the breakers are bad. Some of them will do their job. But it's just that one. If you have that one, it could be that instance between a fire or not," said Smith.

The Ohio fire marshal doesn't know how many fires have been started by Federal Pacific panels because it doesn't track them. But a fire in Wyoming was blamed on a defective F.P.E. panel, leaving the home with a quarter of a million dollars in damage.

How common are the Federal Pacific Electric panels? In one neighborhood all the houses were built in the late 70's. Going door to door in hopes of finding a F.P.E. home, the very first one was all it took.

Roy Jacocks said he was warned and an article from Angie's List confirmed the dangers. He said replacing his panel has been on his to-do list.

Taking the issue to Powersolutions Group, a company that tests and maintains large power electrical systems, sometimes using the enormous circuit breakers on high-voltage transmission lines. They protect the lines, the overhead lines, so that if there is a fault or a failure, or an overload, the devices will disconnect power to cities.

The F.P.E. panel was nothing like those.

Simulating an overload on the F.P.E. breaker to see if it can handle it, the panel failed the tests over and over and over again. It threw quite a few sparks. It wasn't able to carry the higher current. That would be indicative of a fault. A fault that could have led to a fire.

Some banks won't give people a mortgage if they have one of the F.P.E. panels. And most insurance companies won't insure those homes.

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