



CONSUMER WARNING: this article contains misleading information concerning the FPE Stab-Lok circuit breaker history, hazards, and performance. Click on any page of this article copy for independent research and cautions about FPE Stab-Lok equipment found at InspectApedia.com

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Federal Pacific Electric Co. Stab-lok® Update

In 1983, the CPSC closed its investigation and stated that the data available to the Commission, at that time, did not establish that the circuit breakers presented a serious risk of injury to consumers. There was never an investigation of loadcenters. by CPSC

From the early 1950's through the mid-1980's, Federal Pacific Electric (FPE) was a major manufacturer of circuit breakers and electrical distribution equipment. Early on, FPE introduced Stab-lok® residential circuit breakers and loadcenters. The heart of the Stab-lok® circuit breaker was automatically manufactured and calibrated; this mechanism was independent of the insulating enclosure; there were no screws to adjust and the stabs provided a low watt's loss firm connection to the loadcenter bus. Several hundred million circuit breakers and the millions of loadcenters have been installed over the years.

FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters can still be found in millions of homes. But, FPE didn't just fade away. Even though FPE hasn't made a circuit breaker since 1986, certain assets including the circuit breaker operations were acquired by other companies. Therefore, listed and labeled replacements for Stab-lok® circuit breakers continue to be available. In the U.S. UL listed Stab-lok® circuit breakers can be obtained from the American Circuit Breaker Corporation. Telephone 1-800-343-1910.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the status of the installed base of the millions of FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters. Are the UL labels valid?

Yes. The UL labels for FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters are still valid. These devices have been continually listed since the 1950's. The present listing holder is the American Circuit Breaker Corporation. Look under Circuit Breakers...(DIVQ) and Panelboards (QEUY), File numbers E9800 and E24523 respectively. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (DKUY) are similarly listed under File number E51414.

Have there been recalls of any installed residential FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters?

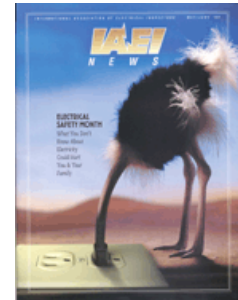
No. FPE has never conducted a recall of any installed residential circuit breakers or loadcenters nor has any agency required that FPE conduct such a recall.

What about the US Consumer Product Safety Commission? Didn't they conduct an investigation of FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters?

In 1980, FPE, as required by law, reported to the CPSC that there might be a problem with certain Stab-lok® two pole circuit breakers. CPSC conducted an investigation. In 1983, the CPSC closed its investigation and stated that the data available to the Commission, at that time, did not establish that the circuit breakers presented a serious risk of injury to consumers. There was never an investigation of loadcenters. To provide completeness the text of the CPSC press release of March 1983 is reprinted at the end of this article.

Why then, are there supposedly authoritative statements being

Inside This Month:



What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

Stab-lok® Update

Dedicated Equipment Space

Equipment Certification as Partnership

Grounding and Power Quality

Hazardous Swimming Pools

circulated that imply that FPE Stab-lok® circuit breakers and loadcenters are not up to snuff?

There are no authoritative statements. But, around 1981, FPE conducted a major recall of certain industrial circuit breakers. The publicity relating to this recall and the concurrent CPSC investigation of residential circuit breakers could certainly have engendered confusion.

What about the web site¹ that alleges that FPE Stab-lok® panels and circuit breakers "are a latent hazard and can fail, leading to electrical fires?"

It's a free country. Anyone can publish information on a web site whether or not the information is correct. In support of his allegations, this individual cites many of the documents produced for the CPSC investigation which was discontinued in 1983. The CPSC has retained the right to reopen its investigation and has not done so. Further, this individual has never contacted FPE nor has he reported any electrical fires to FPE.

How should we respond to home inspectors who state that FPE Stab-lok® loadcenters and circuit breakers are hazardous and should be replaced.

Unsupported recommendations should be disregarded. However, loadcenters and circuit breakers, whether manufactured by FPE or others, should be evaluated for code compliance, i.e., proper installation, application, and maintenance. Evaluation should be done by a licensed and qualified electrician and/or a qualified electrical inspector. FPE equipment should be treated in exactly the same manner as any other similar equipment.

SUMMARY

This article was prepared by the former quality manager of FPE, who is a consultant to the company, in cooperation with other knowledgeable persons. The material is presented as information for electrical inspectors. This information is neither approved nor disapproved by the International Association of Electrical Inspectors. The gist of this article is that FPE Stab-lok® loadcenters and circuit breakers are listed and labeled, and suitable for the usage intended. Even though FPE has not manufactured any products since 1986, the Federal Pacific Electric Company still exists. To contact the company, write to Howard B. Abramoff, Esquire, at 25700 Science Park Drive, Suite 260, Cleveland, Ohio 44122.

US Consumer Products Safety Commission Closes Two-Year Investigation of Stab-lok® circuit breakers**US Consumer Product Safety Commission Release Concerning FPE circuit breakers:**

COMMISSION CLOSES INVESTIGATION OF FPE CIRCUIT BREAKERS AND PROVIDES SAFETY INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

FOR RELEASE: MARCH 3, 1983

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Consumer Product Safety Commission announced today that it is closing its two year investigation into Federal Pacific Electric Stab-lok type residential circuit breakers. This action was taken because the data currently available to the Commission does not establish that the circuit breakers present a serious risk of injury to consumers.

The Commission investigation into Federal Pacific Electric (FPE) circuit breakers began in June, 1980, when Reliance Electric Co., a subsidiary of Exxon Corporation and the parent to FPE, reported to the Commission that many FPE circuit breakers did not fully comply with Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL) requirements. Commission testing confirmed that these breakers fail certain UL calibration test requirements. The Commission investigation focused primarily on 2 pole residential circuit breakers manufactured before Reliance acquired FPE in 1979.

To meet UL standards, residential circuit breakers must pass a number of so-called "calibration tests." The purpose of these tests is to determine whether the circuit breakers will hold the current for which they are rated and also automatically open or "trip" (shut off the current) within specified time limits if over-loading of the circuit causes

current levels in excess of the breaker's amperage rating. (Overloading can occur because a consumer plugs too many products into a circuit or due to the failure of a product or component connected to that circuit.) While the Commission is concerned about the failure of these FPE breakers to meet UL calibration requirements, the Commission is unable at this time to link these failures to the development of a hazardous situation.

According to Reliance, failure of these FPE breakers to comply with certain UL calibration requirements do not create a hazard in the household environment. It is Reliance's position that FPE breakers will trip reliably at most overload levels unless the breakers have been operated in a repetitive, abusive manner that should not occur during residential use. Reliance maintains that, at those few overload levels where FPE breakers may fail to trip under realistic use conditions, currents will be too low to generate hazardous temperatures in household wiring. Reliance believes its position in this regard is supported by test data that it provided to the Commission. The Commission staff believes that it currently has insufficient data to accept or refute Reliance's position.

The Commission staff estimates that it would cost several million dollars to gather the data necessary to assess fully whether those circuit breakers which are installed in homes but which may fail UL calibration tests present a risk to the public. Based on the Commission's limited budget (\$34 million for fiscal year 1983), the known hazards the Commission has identified and must address (involving products of other manufacturers) and the uncertainty of the results of such a costly investigation, the Commission has decided not to commit further resources to its investigation of FPE's circuit breakers. However, despite its decision to close this particular investigation, the Commission will continue its investigation of circuit breakers generally. The Commission can reopen its investigation of FPE breakers if further information warrants.

The Commission advises consumers to take certain safety precautions with all circuit breakers and fuses. Consumers should:

- Know your electrical circuit. Know which outlets and products are connected to each circuit.
- Never overload any electrical circuit by connecting too many products to the circuit. Be particularly careful not to connect several products that demand high current (such as heating appliances) to a low amperage circuit.
- Comply with local building codes in wiring or adding electrical circuits. Make sure the wiring and devices used in the circuit are connected to a circuit breaker or fuse of the proper size.
- Immediately disconnect any electrical product if problems develop. Have the product examined by a competent repair person.
- Investigate to determine why a fuse blows or circuit breaker trips. Do not simply replace the fuse or reset the breaker. If a fuse blows or breaker trips, it is often a warning that the circuit is overloaded. Check the circuit for causes of overloading (for example, too many appliances plugged in, a malfunctioning product, a short circuit). When in doubt, consult a licensed electrician.

Consumers who have questions concerning circuit breakers, or who wish to report information relating to their safety, may call the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's toll-free safety hotline at 800-638-CPSC, teletypewriter for the hearing impaired at 800-638-8270 (Maryland only 800-492-8104).