
February 2004

Hazards of electrical panels and equipment

The Accident

A restaurant supervisor received very serious injuries when attempting to recover a set of keys that has fallen behind electrical equipment in the back office. A fellow worker called the police and had the power turned off before removing the victim. Without the help of the second person, this victim could have died.

Facts

- Electricity is invisible, silent, dangerous and not obvious to most people.
- It is common to find electrical equipment in closets or backrooms of shops, offices and restaurants. Because of cramped space, people often use the electrical equipment as tables, shelves, even storage.
- In most cases, the electrical equipment or panels look just like any part of the building. There is no flashing light or sparks and often, they do not generate sound. When the electrical panels are opened and electrical and component exposed, despite the danger, they still look deceptively harmless.
- Most electrical panels or equipment are not marked to warn common people of potential danger.
 - Some equipment can overheat when the vent is covered with clothing or cloth or cardboard. It can initiate fires.
 - Electricity and electrical equipment can do harm even without physically touching the actual equipment, components or wires. Electricity can travel through air and hurt a human body.

What to do when you find electrical equipment in your office or closet.

1. Do not block access to electrical panels and equipment. Electricians should have immediate access to the panels and equipment in case they needed to be turned off in a hurry.
 2. Do not place objects near, on or inside the equipment. You can create a fire hazard by doing so and worse, you can be seriously injured.
 3. Warn co-workers about the danger of electrical equipment; place warning signs and this hazard notice on the panel or cover of the equipment.
 4. Do not open panels or covers of the electrical equipment, regardless how harmless the equipment looks. If an object accidentally fell inside or behind the panel or equipment, call a qualified electrician to do the job. Do not attempt to retrieve by opening any panels, covers or inserting objects such as wires or wooden object inside the electrical equipment through openings and vents.
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