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33% of residential fires link to electrical distribution equipment

Ontario's Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) warns the public that 33% of residential fires reported by the office of the Ontario Fire Marshal are associated with electrical distribution equipment. This includes: electrical circuit wiring, damaged or improperly rated extension cords or cable, panel and circuit boards, and receptacles and switches; and are prevalent in both copper and aluminum wiring systems. Investigations of these electrical fires identified that 34% are attributed to incorrect or improper installation and procedure.

Through recent research conducted with Ontario homeowners, ESA identified that 47% of residents living in homes 15 to 50 years old have modified or replaced electrical wiring and electrical components. This increased to 84% for homes greater than 50 years.

Electrical wiring is complicated and presents safety hazards if not properly installed and maintained. Homeowners are encouraged to ensure their electrical installations meet the safety standards defined in the Ontario Electrical Safety Code by engaging a licensed electrical contractor to evaluate their electrical system if they have signs of potential electrical hazards, such as: circuit breakers that frequently trip or fuses that frequently blow, lights that flicker, and signs of wiring deterioration; or if they have concerns about the qualifications of individuals who previously worked on their electrical system.

In response to concerns about unqualified individuals doing electrical work, Ontario regulation was introduced in January 2007 requiring any person operating an electrical contracting business to be licensed by the Electrical Safety Authority. Homeowners should retain the services of a licensed electrical contractor to ensure their electrical installations are done correctly and safely. In addition, homeowners should confirm with their licensed electrical contractor that an application for inspection was filed with the Electrical Safety Authority for any electrical work done on their premises, and ask for a copy of the Certificate of Inspection – their record that the installation meets Ontario's safety standards.

When planning to do electrical work, think about the risks associated with unsafe electrical installations. Contact a licensed electrical contractor, and make sure they arrange for an electrical permit. Visit www.pluginsafely.ca for a list of licensed electrical contractors in Ontario.
