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Hazards associated with electrical panels and equipment not located in electrical rooms

The Accident

A restaurant supervisor received very serious injuries when attempting to recover a set of keys that fell 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, the 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 or even for storage.
- In most cases, the electrical equipment or panels look just like any part of the building. There are no flashing lights or sparks and often, they do not generate sound. When the electrical panels are opened and electrical components are exposed, despite the danger, they still look deceptively harmless.
- Most electrical panels or equipment are not marked to warn people of potential danger.
 - Some equipment can overheat and initiate fires when the vent is covered with clothing, cloth or cardboard.
 - Electricity and electrical equipment can do harm even without physically touching the actual equipment, components or wires. Electricity can travel through air and cause injury.

For electrical equipment in your office or closet:

1. Do not block access to electrical panels and equipment. Immediate access to the panels and equipment may be required in case they need to be turned off in a hurry.
2. Do not place objects near, on or inside the equipment as this can create a fire hazard and increases the risk of injury. Even if the space is cramped, do not use electrical equipment as tables, shelves, or storage.
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. Regardless of how harmless the equipment looks, do not open panels or covers of the electrical equipment. If an object accidentally falls inside or behind the panel or equipment, call a qualified person or Licensed Electrical Contractor to safely retrieve the object. Do not attempt to retrieve by opening any panels, covers or inserting objects such as wires or wooden objects inside the electrical equipment through openings and vents.