

Don't Trust That Refrigerator

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters or GFCI's are an important electrical safety device found in modern homes. They can be identified by the little red and black buttons in the center of the outlet. These are the outlets that commonly "pop" when your wife uses the hair dryer. It is a very sensitive circuit breaker that is designed to open whenever it senses a "Ground Fault" in the electric circuit. The breaker is so sensitive that it opens the circuit before the potential victim can feel the shock. The system has been in use since the mid 1970's and has saved countless lives. It is unknown how many lives the device saves each year but it is estimated that it is second behind the smoke detector for saving lives in residential housing.

What is not commonly known about GFCI's is that the breakers are not designed to operate electric motors. Because that are so sensitive they can mistake a spark in the electric motor for a personal safety ground fault and open. It only takes 5 milli amps of current to trip a GFCI. Many people routinely operate a refrigerator or freezer in their garage which is protected by a GFCI. The danger is that when the electric motors begin to age they can trip the GFCI and turn their selves off. This can be costly when one comes home from vacation and finds the food in the refrigerator has spoiled. The same thing can happen on the landscape timers. The timer drags for some reason and turns off and then the landscaping goes without water until the problem is discovered. Many old timers will remove the GFCI's for this reason. Many electric tools will trip the breaker and cause difficulty for the homeowner handyman so they remove the GFCI and abandon the safety that the system provides.

The proper way to run your electric motors is to provide a single outlet dedicated just for that one motor. As long as there is only single outlet, don't be confused with a dual outlet as you would normally see in a home but just a single outlet for a single plug in, it is considered safe. If there is a dual outlet then the unused second outlet would not be GFCI protected and could be a safety hazard.

A Home Inspector can help you identify safety and operational issues in your home. If you do happen to need a Home Inspection be sure to use a qualified inspector. The California Real Estate Inspection Association is the premiere inspection association in the State of California. Certified Inspector Members must pass a written exam, attend regular chapter meetings and obtain at least 30 hours of continuing education each year. Each inspection report is written to the standards of practice to insure the client of have all the required systems evaluated by the inspector. Look for the CREIA badge for a good home inspection. If you have any questions about your home I can be reached at 613-1430 or emailed at HomeInspect2020@aol.com.