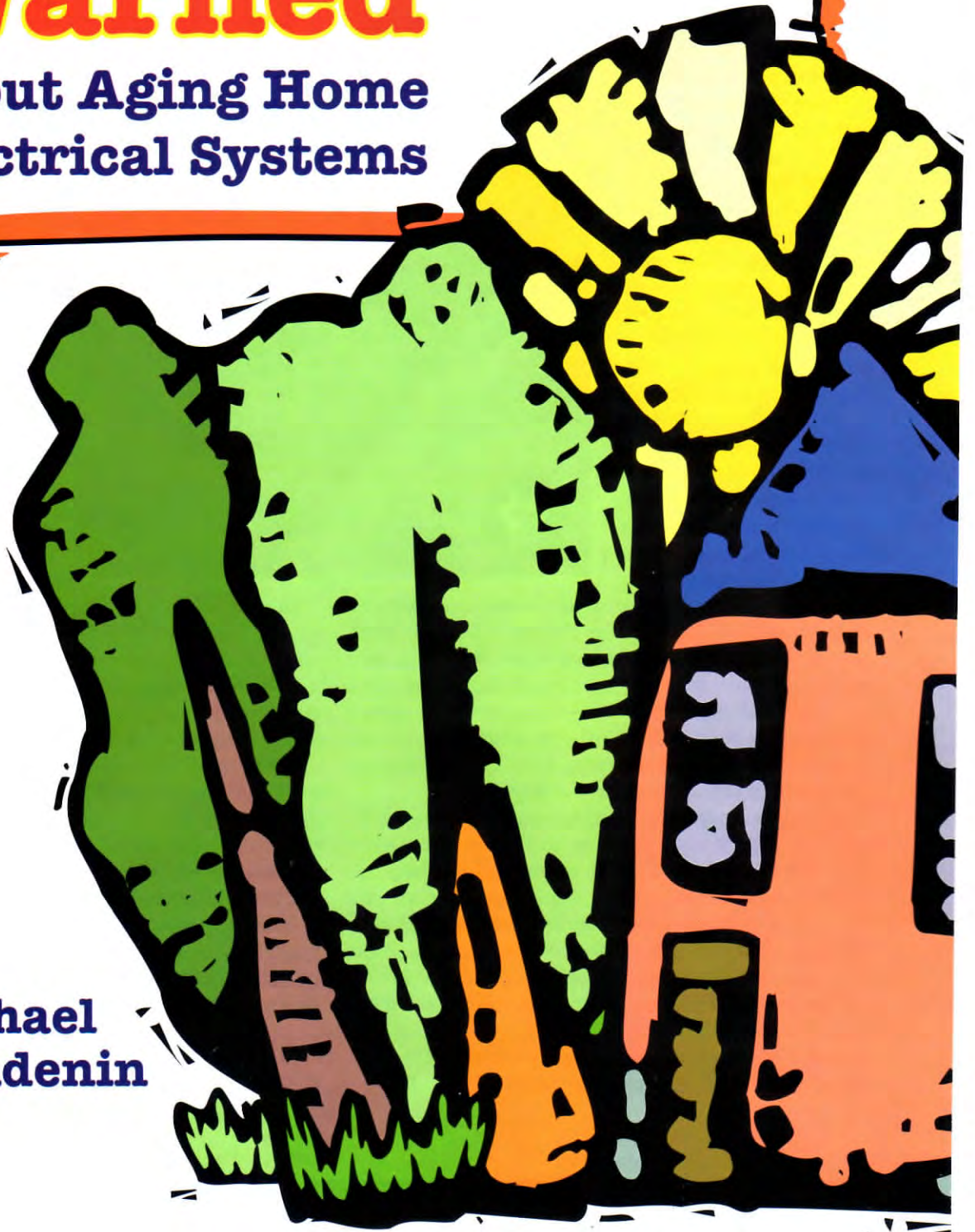


# Homeowners Warned

About Aging Home  
Electrical Systems

by  
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Owners of older homes may have a much more alarming problem than peeling paint and loose floorboards lurking behind their walls. According to the latest statistics from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), electrical distribution was the largest cause of property damage wreaking \$643.2 million in property damage in home structure fires, and the third leading cause of home structure fires, causing 40,400 fires, the second leading cause of death (329) and third leading cause of home fire injuries (1,357) between 1994 and 1998, the latest data available.

According to the latest statistics from the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), household wiring also tied with small appliances as the leading cause of accidental electrocutions associated with consumer products. For this reason, the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) is urging homeowners to have their homes electrically inspected, particularly if they fall into one of the following categories:

- owner of a home 40 or more years old;
- owner of a home 10 or more years old that has had major renovation, addition or major new appliance; or
- new owner of a previously owned home.

“If your home has dim or flickering lights, loose receptacles, circuit breakers that frequently trip or fuses that frequently pop, hot or discolored outlets and light switch cover plates, or damaged wire insulation, your home may well be a fire waiting to happen,” warned ESFI Executive Director Michael G. Clendenin. “That is your home’s way of telling you that you have a problem.”

ESFI also urges homeowners to know if their homes have aluminum wiring, and if so, to monitor it more closely. Because aluminum wire oxidizes more rapidly than copper wire, it presents a greater potential fire hazard; oxidation increases resistance and heat buildup along the circuit. Since aluminum wire expands and contracts at a greater rate than copper wire, there is also a greater likelihood that gaps could develop at connections, potentially leading to hazardous arcs and glowing connections.

Even in younger homes, new homeowners should take an active role in understanding the condition of the current electrical system, its capacity, limitations, and potential hazards. ESFI encourages homeowners to seek the assistance of an electrical inspector or a qualified, licensed electrician to inspect the home’s circuitry and ensure the home’s circuits are not overloaded and the home’s electrical service can adequately supply the demand. Homeowners are also encouraged to develop a detailed map of the circuitry showing which outlets and fixtures are served by which circuits and how much power is being demanded of each.

Clendenin says that electrical inspections can catch problems hidden behind the walls and correct them before they turn tragic. In many cases, technologies such as ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) and newer arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs) can be installed to help prevent a fire and accidental electrocution. The bottom line is: *Inspect and Protect* — call a qualified, licensed electrician to schedule an electrical inspection.”

These and other electrical safety tips are available at the Foundation’s web site at [www.electrical-safety.org](http://www.electrical-safety.org) or by phone at 703-841-3229.

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Founded in 1994, ESFI is the nation’s only non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety in the home, school and workplace. A registered 501(c)(3) funded by the nation’s top electrical manufacturers, independent testing laboratories, utilities, and electrical unions and associations, ESFI sponsors National Electrical Safety Month each May, and engages in public education campaigns and proactive media relations to help reduce property damage, injury and death due to electrical accidents.

