

Dear Friend,

Each month, BOWA Home Advisor provides you with important tips on how to improve and protect your home's value. We hope the following is helpful.



Custom Renovation
Chevy Chase, MD

Are your Circuits Protected?

Today's electrical codes and standards call for ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to be installed wherever there is the potential for contact between a person, an electrical appliance and moisture, water or water pipes. As they present a greater shocking hazard, this applies to receptacles near water sources in bathrooms, utility rooms, kitchens and other rooms, as well as receptacles near pools, hot tubs and other outdoor locations. Even aquariums or decorative water features could warrant such a precaution.

By constantly monitoring the electrical flow in the circuit, GFCIs can greatly reduce the risk of shock and danger to your family. When the GFCI device detects a variance greater than five milliamperes between the current flowing **to** the appliance and the current flowing **from** the appliance, it instantly switches off the electricity. GFCIs are far more sensitive than typical circuit breakers, which interrupt the circuit at 20 amperes. Since it only takes about 100 milliamperes to electrocute a person, GFCIs are effective at interrupting the current before it reaches a magnitude high enough to cause harm.

Also referred to as GFIs, or ground-fault interrupters, these units are primarily installed either directly in a receptacle outlet or at the circuit breaker panel. A GFI outlet, which replaces a standard unit, protects any appliance plugged into it and can also be wired to protect other connected outlets. A GFI outlet has both a test button and a reset button on the unit. The test button will trip the circuit, causing the reset button to pop. To reset the device, simply push the reset button back in. It is recommended that such a test is performed occasionally to ensure the GFI outlet is operating properly.

Alternatively, a GFI circuit breaker controls an entire circuit, and is installed as a replacement for a breaker on the home's main circuit board. Some homes are wired so that all bathrooms or all outdoor fixtures are on the same circuit. In

this case, one GFI circuit breaker can protect the entire circuit, thus making multiple GFI outlets unnecessary. Resetting a GFI circuit breaker is a little different than resetting an outlet-type GFI, as there is no "reset" switch. Instead, the GFI breaker is reset by first switching the breaker to the full "off" position, then to the full "on" position to restore power.

While their value is immeasurable, GFIs are very sensitive and subject to nuisance tripping. Therefore, it is recommended that lights and critical appliances, such as refrigerators, freezers and sump pumps, **not** be installed on a GFI-protected receptacle.

It is important to note that, over time, GFIs will likely become more sensitive to minor variations in current that are caused by certain types of appliances. For example, hair dryers and space heaters are notorious for stressing and tripping GFIs. Replacing the GFI will help solve this problem, though it may recur eventually as the new GFI ages. Of course, as when dealing with any home electrical issues, it is recommended that a licensed electrician be consulted for GFI installation or repairs.

A word to the wise....Save yourself some hassle, if you notice an outlet that isn't working, first try to reset the GFI before calling an electrician!

For your convenience, past issues of the *BOWA Home Advisor*, are available in the 'About Us' section of our [web site](#).

If you would like more information on any of these topics or if there are other ways we can be of service, please contact [BOWA Builders](#).

Regards.



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