



WELCOME

You're reading the very first edition of our newsletter. We hope this will be an important resource for all our licensees. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the State of Tennessee or the Home Inspector Licensing Program.

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Home for the Holidays

It's that time of year when everyone is gathering together at home. Friends, family, even a few people you don't remember inviting. But as stressful as the holidays may seem to us, they are often just as hard on our houses. This is the season when furnaces, chimneys, and gutters all get pushed to their limits and the hard work that home inspectors do throughout the year is truly put to the test. Increasingly home owners are turning to routine inspections as a means to stave off the potential of bigger repair problems. With Thanksgiving just a few days away, here are a couple of simple tips we should all remember this weekend...





Turkey Temptation

Here are some tips to avoid starring in an insurance commercial:

- Never leave the fryer unattended. It's a two person job at minimum. A typical fry kit lacks temperature control or any sort of automatic shut-off. That means the oil will continue to heat until the vapors ignite.
- Watch the weather. It'll be tempting to seek shelter from the cold but you should set up a safe distance from anything you don't want to see engulfed in flames. No decks, garages, coverings, or overhangs.
- Rain or snow is a no-go. Precipitation causes splatters and flare ups.
- Defrost and thoroughly dry your bird, its cavity and exterior should be completely clean.
- Be exact with the oil, accounting for the size and weight of your turkeys. Peanut oil is used for its high smoke point. At 350 degrees, it's as flammable as gasoline. At 400 degrees, it goes rancid. If you see smoke, you're overheating.

To Fry or Not to Fry

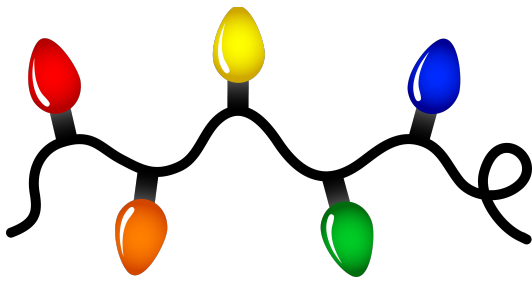
Science tells us that if something tastes good, it will taste even better fried. Here in the south we'll go to great lengths to deep fry our favorite foods. One of the biggest trends over the last ten years has been the rise in turkey frying (and turkey frying accidents). For most homeowners the risks simply outweigh the rewards. Even with proper supervision a \$40 fry kit can end up torching a \$400,000 home. In Tennessee the fires related to turkey frying have resulted in several million dollars' worth of property damage and the State Fire Marshal's Office strongly discourages the use of these outdoor gas-fueled fryers. There are plenty of alternatives, including new infrared "oil-free" fryers. If you absolutely **MUST** deep fry your turkey, then you absolutely **MUST** have an all-purpose fire extinguisher at the ready.



A Very Black Friday

The day after Thanksgiving is infamous as the busiest shopping day of the year, but did you know it's also the busiest day of the year for plumbers? Think about it: all those clogged disposals, drains filled with sticky grease and swollen bits of food, and all those overstuffed in-laws backing up the sewer lines. In fact, plumbers are so busy this season (and so eager to charge you for their time) that homeowners with a plumbing emergency at any point between now and the new year will often find themselves in deep... well... trouble. As always it's best to be proactive. To avoid holiday disaster snake those slow drain lines to ensure they'll handle the extra load. Ask your houseguests to space out their showering by fifteen minutes, that'll help with proper drainage and let your water heater recover. Don't forget to make sure that

everyone on kitchen duty understands the difference between a garbage disposal and a garbage can.



Electric Boogaloo

This will also be the weekend that millions of Americans start putting up their Christmas decorations. All the extra activity, additional houseguests, and holiday lighting can attribute to a sky high energy bill as well as the potential for electrical overload. As you prep the house for company, check for ghosting... phantom charges, anything that's plugged in and drawing power that doesn't need to be. Before you find yourself up on that ladder, take the time to lay out your lights and inspect them for damage. Outdoor lights especially are subject to a lot of wintery abuse. Exposed wires, cracked insulation, broken bulbs, and unlit strands are all signs it's time for an upgrade. Newer LED lights may cost a little more upfront, but they will dramatically reduce the load on your outlets. So few home owners seem to understand how their houses are wired and the power demands they're placing on each circuit. Many consumers think a power strip is the answer to all their problems, plugging everything into a single outlet on a single circuit. The other common mistake is chaining together too many strings of lights—hook up more than three in a row and you're in for a fire hazard. Unfortunately people also make many of the same mistakes when it comes to their extension cords: connecting multiple cords together, using incorrect amperage, and placing indoor-rated cords outside. Even during the most wonderful time of the year, there is plenty of potential for things to go wrong.

Perhaps the single most important thing that you and your clients can do at the start of the holiday season is test your smoke alarms...



“Working smoke alarms save lives and should be installed and maintained in every home,” State Fire Marshal Gary West says. “Age affects a smoke alarm’s effectiveness, so if your alarms are 10 years or older, they need to be replaced!”

The state’s fire incident reports for 2013 indicated that 70 percent of fatal fires occurred in homes with no working smoke alarms. Increasing the presence of smoke alarms in Tennessee households increases the possibility more lives can be saved from fire danger.

- For best protection, equip your home with a combination of ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms or dual-sensor alarms. Interconnect the alarms so that when one sounds, all sound.
- Smoke alarms should be installed in every room where an occupant sleeps, outside every sleeping area and on each level of the home, including the basement. Make sure everyone can hear the alarms and knows what they sound like.
- Dust or vacuum smoke alarms whenever the battery is changed. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning.
- Test alarms once a month using the test button. Replace the entire alarm if it’s more than 10 years old or you suspect isn’t working properly.

New Requirements

As of November 2014, several important changes have gone into effect regarding our fee structures, renewal requirements, and course approvals. Here are some of the most important new rules to remember:

Renewals: Licensees are now limited on the number of times they can take the same course for renewal credit. Credit will not be granted for courses repeated within a three year period. Certain exceptions will apply to courses that undergo significant updates.



Course Providers: A \$50 application fee is now required whenever course providers submit new classes for approval. If approved, they'll be valid for two years. Providers may submit the course for renewal at least thirty days prior to expiration, with a \$50 renewal fee.

Inactive Status: The fee to go inactive is \$50, and the fee to reactivate is \$200. If your renewal falls within this period of inactivity now you'll only need to pay a \$50 renewal fee. But don't forget that for reactivation you must present continuing education hours to satisfy whatever renewal you missed.

Individual Course Approval: Credit may be granted for applicants and licensees on an individual basis for courses not currently part of our listing. You must prove the course meets applicable requirements in an approved category. To be considered, a \$25 application fee is required with the documentation.

Change of Information: All licensees must maintain active insurance and a current address on file with the Board. You have thirty days to notify us of any changes with either.





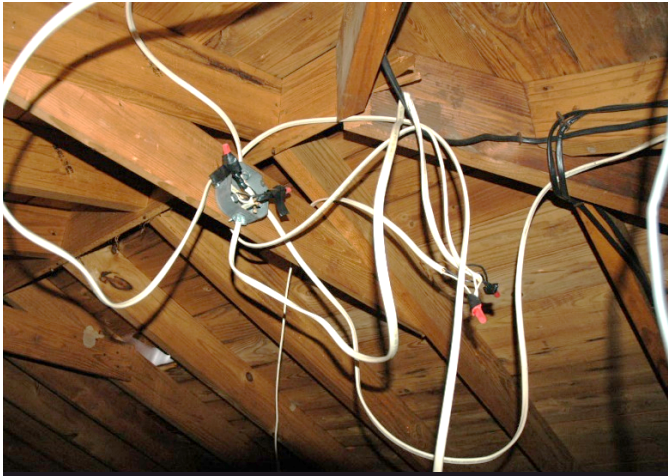
TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS

By Mike Twitty, ACI

Home inspections require a significant amount of concentration to properly evaluate all the pertinent systems. There are always distractions that can detour this concentration. These could be anything... from a ringing cell phone (best left in the truck if possible), an impatient realtor, inquisitive children wondering why you are looking in their closet, or a very interactive client, just to name a few. Couple any of these with a momentary “senior moment” and you may forget why you are looking in the kid’s closet!

I thought I would discuss a few issues that can be easily overlooked during a typical electrical system inspection.

We all see what I call B.I.L.W. far too often in the homes we inspect. This acronym stands for “Brother-In-Law Wiring.” You know what I’m talking about. It usually resembles a back-lashed bait casting fishing reel that was cast into a 30 mile an hour wind... wires going in all different directions and originating from a tangled mess! Homes with these installations put us on guard to carefully check everything.



Unprofessional installations like this are far too commonplace in homes.

But what about a neat installation in a panel with all circuits labeled, cable clamps in place, and properly matched wire size to breaker size? The first thought is that all is well and maybe you won't have to write an encyclopedia sized concern summary. This is a welcome sight to any inspector and usually is an indication that a professional may have actually done the work... but don't let your guard down. There could be concerns lurking in the shadows that are not so obvious.

I am just going to mention a few concerns that I see regularly and can be easily overlooked if you are not on your toes...

Look Up!

When inspecting the service be sure to examine the condition of the service conductors at the point of attachment and also back to the utility pole. Many times these wires have cracked or are missing insulation and need replacement.

This should be the responsibility of the power company to repair but it is your client's future home that could burn down if there is a fault.



A short in the service drop conductors could have catastrophic results.

HVAC Sub Panels

Many weekend electricians (and brother-in-laws) will add a circuit for a receptacle or light from an available circuit space in these panels. The trouble is, the HVAC system usually only needs a 240 volt circuit and does not have a neutral. Brother-in-law's light and plug will work, but the supply grounding conductor is now carrying the neutral current for his marvelous installation and could be dangerous. Also check these panels for proper bonding; I see this missing on a regular basis.



Brother-in-law strikes again!



Receptacles and switches are listed and rated for the intended use.

Dryer Circuits

I see this fairly often, particularly in '50s and '60s style homes. There is a 40 amp double-pole breaker with #6 stranded aluminum wires attached. No problem, right, everything is compliant; but a closer look reveals that this is the dryer circuit; O.K. so what? Well dryer receptacles are rated for 30 amps. The wiring and breakers are properly matched but the weak link in the circuit is the receptacle. Simple fix: The breaker should be changed to a proper 30 amp breaker.



30 Amp Single Pole Breakers

Most of the time this is a red flag in residences. There are situations where this installation is correct for specialized circuits but I have found that these are usually feeding receptacles and lights. Brother-in-law thought he could get more electricity by upsizing to 30 amp breakers! Same scenario as with the dryer circuit. Most standard receptacles and switches are rated for 15 or 20 amps, so even if the wiring is sized appropriately, the weak link is the outlet device.

Service Panel Upgrades

Many homes have electrical service upgrades to handle the increasing demand for power in today's world. This is a valuable improvement when done properly. Unfortunately, far too often, only part of the upgrade is completed. I have seen homes upgraded from 100 to 200 amp services with new panels, new larger service entrance conductors, and run it all through the old 100 amp rated meter base. Again, the weak link in the system. Always check the meter base when upgrades have been done. These are usually bootleg jobs with no permit or inspection.

Bootleg or False Grounds

We all see older homes that have been remodeled and have 3-prong receptacles with no grounding conductor. This goes in the report as a defect and recommendations for correction. But what if your neon tester shows a proper ground on all of the receptacles and when you open the main panel, there are only one or two or maybe no circuits at all returning to the panel with grounding conductors? It checked O.K. so what's up? At this point, we have thrown brother-in-law under the bus so much he has more tire tracks on him than a 1960's drive-in parking lot, so we're not going to blame him. This is usually the work of an experienced but dishonest electrician. This guy knows he can put

a jumper on the receptacle to connect the ground screw to the neutral and “fool” the inspector’s little pocket tester. Shame on him! If all of the receptacles test O.K. and there aren’t enough grounding conductors in the panel, check a little further. There could be an improper ground connection to a water pipe; maybe remove a cover or two and look for the jumper or invest in a circuit analyzer that will detect the false grounds. They are a little pricey but are worth the investment in my opinion.

The old saying goes “don’t judge a book by its cover.” This is a good rule to live by when inspecting homes. All is not always what it seems...

This article originally appeared in the ASHI Reporter. Words and photos by Mike Twitty. Mr. Twitty is the owner of Homescan Inspections in Mount Juliet, TN.

Call For Submissions

The Home Inspector Licensing Program was created to ensure that all of Tennessee’s inspectors are qualified and hold the highest appropriate professional standards. We believe that this newsletter will serve an important function, informing and educating our licensees, but in order to fulfill that mission we need your help! We want your thoughts, your photos, your articles and suggestions. We want to make sure we’re representing every experience level and every part of the state. Let us know what you want to see in this space! Reach our editor at cody.kemmer@tn.gov

Have a happy and safe holiday season.

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