

Breaker Panels

One of the most neglected electrical items in your home, office building and hotel is what? Did you guess this one correctly? It's your breaker panel. This is the heart of the electrical distribution in any building. We all know this to be fact because when the power goes off in a room or a section of the hotel, we make a mad rush for the breaker panel.

These panels need to have a maintenance schedule like everything else we, the engineering section, take care of. Usually the main service panel is located on the back or side of your house or even in the basement. In office buildings and hotels they are usually in a main electrical room with subpanels all over the place. The breaker panels we are mostly concerned about are the ones that are located outside, in basements or the ones known to be old.

The maintenance on all panels is generally the same and for the most part, simple. The first thing to do is turn the power off to the panel. This will help you not to become part of a circuit if you mistakenly touch a hot line. Items for inspection and servicing are a flashlight, compressor or compact air tank for blowing away dirt and dust, bug spray and an electrical component spray cleaner. For those outside panels that have been sitting there with the panel door open, the bug spray is the first thing you use. Don't drench everything. Spray a mist around the inside and let it sit a few minutes to get rid of the bugs and spiders. Open the panel and blow out all webs, dust, dirt and whatever may have gotten in there to reside.

Use the electrical component cleaner to clean off all the breakers and incoming lines. You can be generous with this. Use your flashlight with a bright light and inspect incoming wiring for any cracking of the insulation. If there are any problems, now is the time for repair. I would recommend doing a visual at least every six months on those outside panels, inside once a year.

Cleaning, depending how exposed the outside panels are, it is recommended at least once a year. For those of us that work in hotels that are in highly wooded areas there is the little problem we get at times with our little, furry friends, mice. They seem to want to nest around the beams next to the breaker panel. Have you seen some of their nesting materials? It is the wire insulation. I guess you get the idea of why we have breaker panel maintenance.

The time schedule I gave is just a suggestion. You can build your own maintenance schedule depending on your property's needs. Until our next maintenance tip, *Think Safety First.*

Tom Abeyta
Chief Engineer