

The anonymity of the author together with the disclaimer regarding IAEI agreement with the article's content make this article very unusual among articles in IAEI News. Nevertheless, electrical inspectors, having read the article in their own professional organization's publication, are likely to reflect the article's position when dealing with inquiries on this subject. Considering the New Jersey Court's finding of fraud on the part of FPE, the article that FPE/Reliance provided to IAEI news may be viewed as an extension of the fraud -- an effort to "whitewash" a serious breach of corporate and individual ethics and help protect the companies involved.

Presently, there is a class action lawsuit under way against FPE/Reliance in New Jersey. This legal action, initiated about ten years ago, has documented and proven FPE's fraud, that they (FPE) misrepresented to the public that their circuit breakers met the applicable (UL) standards when, in fact, they did not.¹¹

10. SHOULD FPE STAB-LOK® PANELS BE REPLACED?

If you inspected your own home and found that it had a fuse box with 1/3 of the circuits over-fused or with pennies behind the fuses, how long would it be before you had it corrected? Would you sleep tight without it being corrected? Would the fact that your house had not had any problem (burned down yet) because of the over-fusing and pennies influence your decision as to whether or not to take corrective action?

Unlike over-fusing and pennies behind the fuses, defective FPE Stab-Lok® breakers cannot be spotted by an inspector or tested by an electrician or homeowner. Without doing a functional test (at overload and short-circuit conditions) on each breaker, one pole at a time for the two-pole breakers, one cannot actually determine the present operating characteristics of a breaker. Which of the 20-Amp breakers really have the trip characteristics of 30-Amp breakers (same as over-fusing)? Which will not trip at all (same as a penny behind a fuse)?

Most electricians or electrical inspectors can only look at the breakers ("they look OK to me"), and operate the toggle ("they click on and off OK"). But without doing live-current functional testing on all of the breakers, it is impossible to determine which of the breakers in the panel are defective. Will they all trip safely and properly on electrical overload or short circuit? Electrical contractors and inspectors are generally not equipped to do that type of testing, and homeowners or potential purchasers are not likely to have the required budget for extensive specialized testing. In fact, thorough testing would most likely cost far more than changing the panel.

The presence of an FPE panel in a home should be classified as a "Safety Defect". The FPE Stab-Lok® breakers are primary safety devices of questionable operating reliability. It is not quite correct to call the non-tripping breaker a "fire hazard". That term should be reserved for the electrical failure that causes ignition. The breaker's function is to stop certain electrical sequences that could, if allowed to proceed, lead to fire in the building. If an electrical fire hazard involving excess current develops somewhere in the building, the breaker is supposed to trip and minimize the possibility of fire ignition. If the breaker is defective, fire is more likely to result.

There is no question but that the FPE Stab-Lok® panels should be replaced. There is no practical and safe alternative.