

# Basement Safety

## Build a Foundation of Safety in the Basement

The basement is one of the most commonly ignored areas of the home. Yet, it is also where some of your most essential—and expensive—home electrical equipment is kept. Heating equipment and electrical distribution systems are two of the leading causes of home fires. You can help keep your home safe by learning the basics of how these systems work and making sure they are properly maintained.

### Safety Building Blocks:

- Check the label inside the door or cover of your electrical service panel to see when your electrical system was last inspected.
- Be sure circuit breakers and fuses are correctly labeled with their amperage and what rooms, circuits or outlets they service. Use correct size and current rating for breakers/fuses.
- Increase your fire protection by having a qualified, licensed electrician replace your standard circuit breakers with AFCI breakers.
- Have your furnace cleaned and inspected annually by a licensed, qualified professional.
- Make sure all fuel-burning equipment, such as furnaces, stoves, and fireplaces, is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home and outside each sleeping area.
- Lower the setting on water heater thermostats to 120° Fahrenheit or below.
- Turn off electric water heaters/turn down gas water heaters before you go away on vacation.
- Clean the dryer lint filter after each load, and keep the area around the dryer free of clutter.
- Check periodically for excessive vibration or movement when the washing machine or dryer is operating, which can put stress on electrical connections.

### Safety Spotlight: AFCIs

Arcing faults are one of the major causes of the more than 51,000 fires that result from electrical problems each year. An arc fault is a dangerous electrical problem caused by damaged, overheated, or stressed electrical wiring/devices.

Arc fault circuit interrupters, or AFCIs, are devices that replace standard circuit breakers in your electrical service panel. AFCIs provide a higher level of electrical fire protection, detecting hazardous arcing conditions and shutting down the electricity before a fire can start. Test AFCIs monthly to make sure they are working properly.

### Energy Saving Tip:

Heating can account for 40% of your annual household energy costs! Keeping your furnace well-maintained can increase its efficiency by more than 10%.

Visit ESFi's *Virtual Home* at <http://virtualhome.esfi.org/> to learn more about home electrical safety.