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Federal Pacific Electric (FPE) Stab-Lok Breakers and Panelboards

What is the best course of action when discovered?

Federal Pacific Electric Company (FPE) manufactured many electrical products while in business including a panelboard and breaker line called Stab-Lok. The Stab-Lok products are no longer manufactured, but millions had been installed in residential and commercial buildings between 1950 and 1985.

The purpose of the breaker is to protect the building from fire in the event of an electrical circuit abnormality.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) investigated many reports in 1982 of Stab-Lok breakers failing to trip as required by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) testing standards. The CPSC did not have the funding to further investigate this problem or arrive at a definitive conclusion.

Additional tests by several others concluded that certain Stab-Lok breakers do not trip according to UL requirements and, in some cases, can jam in the "on" position. In addition, overheating problems have been found within the panelboard internal bus connections.

Unfortunately, this information surfaced after many Stab-Lok installations were completed and had been in service for years.

In 2002, a New Jersey class-action lawsuit¹ decided that the manufacturer of the Stab-Lok breakers committed fraud over many years in issuing UL labels to products they knew did not meet the UL testing requirements.

The National Electrical Code requires that all installed products must be listed and labeled by an independent testing agency to be acceptable for the intended use.

Due to the fraudulent UL testing, the original Stab-Lok panelboards and breakers were never verified as suitable for the intended use. This is because they did not pass the UL tests at the time.

When all factors are considered including general age, tested failure rates and questionable UL acceptance testing, expert sources, including HSB, all agree. Federal Pacific Electric Stab-Lok panelboards and breakers, when discovered, should be replaced with completely new panelboard and breaker installations.

For a detailed review of the FPE Stab-Lok problem and equipment identification refer to: https://inspectapedia.com/fpe/FPE_Stab_Lok_Hazards.php

¹Partial Summary Judgement decision dated 8/15/02 by Judge Bryan D. Garruto, J.S.C., Superior Court of New Jersey, Law Division: Middlesex County, Docket No. L-2904-97.

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