

Reversal of state ruling may prevent home fires



[By Robert Annis](#)

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A decision four years ago that left new homes in Indiana with an increased fire risk will be reconsidered Thursday.

Firefighters and consumer safety groups favor changing the Indiana Electric Code to make two modern safety devices mandatory, halving the chance of electrical fires and saving children from unnecessary electric shocks.

But critics of the modern devices argued four years ago their cost is too high and their claims of added safety are unproven. That's what led the Indiana Fire Prevention and Building Safety Commission to remove the devices from the state code in 2005. Building industry officials appointed by the governor dominate the board.

A home's electric wiring that's old, faulty or pierced by a nail or screw can cause an arc and spark a fire. Arcing yearly causes more than 30,000 U.S. home fires, causing \$750 million in damage, according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, an industry nonprofit based in a Washington, D.C., suburb.

The foundation and area fire department representatives held a news conference today at Pike Township's fire department to discuss the need for arc-fault circuit interrupters. Twenty-seven other states require the devices in new homes.

The nation's Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates arc-fault circuit interrupters — called AFCIs in the trades — could cut the number of house fires by 50 percent.

Lynn Madden, a code specialist for the Indiana Builders Association, argued in an April newsletter that AFCIs are unproven, more apt to trip for little or no reason, and had a shorter lifespan than traditional circuit breakers.

Madden did not return calls seeking further comment.