



Your Healthy Home by Your Inspection Expert

GFCI what?

Here's another one of those "what is this and why do I need it" questions - what is GFCI? Take this quiz: GFCI stands for: A. Garden and Farming Collective Insurance B. Garage Floor Cement Improvement System C. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter D. Girder Framing Continuous I-Beam.

Did you answer C.? You're right! A GFCI, or Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter, is a special electrical receptacle that shuts off the electricity at that outlet if, for example, you drop your hair dryer in a bathtub full of water (hopefully you are not in the tub at the time). Any imbalance in electrical current will be sensed by a GFCI outlet and will make it trip very quickly. Hundreds of electrocutions are prevented by these simple and relatively inexpensive devices. However, as an inspector, I see many homes that do not have any GFCI protected outlets. Is your home one of them?

GFCI protection was not included in building codes until 1973 when GFCI protected outlets were required outside. Now, GFCI outlets are called for in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, unfinished basements, crawlspaces, and laundry rooms! So, depending upon when your home was built, you might or might not have them in some or in all of these places.

Because GFCI protected electrical outlets are so effective at protecting you from fatal electrical shocks, you should consider installing these special receptacles in the places where you do not have them now - kitchen, bathrooms, garage, and laundry room. Can you do this yourself? Although many people are comfortable with turning off the power to the outlet and following the directions in the GFCI box carefully, I would recommend hiring a licensed local electrician to do this work.

You should test your GFCI outlets periodically. Here's how: you will see two buttons on the outlet, usually right in the middle between the two plug areas. Plug a lamp or night light into

one of the outlets and then push the "TEST" button.. The outlet's "RESET" button should pop out, and the light that you plugged in will go out. If the "RESET" button pops out but the light does not go out, the GFCI outlet hasn't been wired correctly. If the "RESET" button does not pop out, the GFCI is defective and should be replaced. If the outlet is working correctly, all you need to do is push in the "RESET" button and power will be restored to the outlet. If the "RESET" button will not reset, this along with the other problems I just mentioned, should be repaired or replaced by a qualified person (electrician).

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