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Zinsco or GTE-Sylvania panels

Why they're unsafe: The circuit breakers inside many Sylvania panels melt to the main 'bus bar'. This means the breaker can't ever trip, even when there's a short or overloaded circuit. So, if there ever is a short or other problems, the surge of power melts wires and starts fires in your home.

The name **Zinsco** anywhere on the panel is a sure sign it should be replaced. Also, many **GTE-Sylvania** or **Sylvania** panels are simply re-branded Zinsco panels or contain the problem Zinsco design. These should also be replaced.

Zinsco Panel Boxes Have 3 Reported Major Faults

1. Zinsco panels may not pass updated safety codes. A leading expert on panel safety says that older Zinsco panels would not receive today's UL listing. These panels would not be allowed to be sold because they no longer pass current safety codes.

2. Zinsco panels may have been created with significant design flaws. Zinsco panels reportedly have defects not shared by other panels of similar age. For example, often certain breakers have loose connections rendering them useless. Should an overcurrent occur, the breakers could melt instead of trip.

3. Zinsco Electric panels may have manufacturing defects. For example, some components are aluminum; the connection between the breakers and buss bar may not be solid; and breakers can appear to be off, yet internally the panel still allows power to flow to the house.

Problems with certain Zinsco panels cannot be seen by the naked eye. Even after the cover of Zinsco panels has been removed, everything can seem to be in fine working order. Upon exploring its components, electricians find that breakers cannot be removed from the buss bar. They've welded together, which indicates that the breakers have melted. In that condition, a breaker would be unable to trip and may be allowing an unsafe amount of electricity into the home! This could lead to a potential fire. Do not attempt to remove breakers from your own panel to see if they've melted. Contact a licensed electrician. Zinsco panels can be electrical shock risks; they can appear to be shut off but are still conducting electricity.

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Expert Opinion on Zinsco Panels

"These circuit breakers do not offer the level of overcurrent and fire protection provided by most other electrical panels and circuit breakers. This equipment presents greater risk of fire or other electrical hazard. Where Zinsco electrical panels are discovered in buildings, they should be replaced to reduce some very real fire and shock hazards."

"Where Zinsco electrical panels and Zinsco circuit breakers are in use, arcing, contact-point burn, and even circuit breaker case blow-out have been observed in the field. A principal Zinsco circuit breaker point of failure appears to be at the point of contact where the circuit breaker contacts clip onto the electrical panel bus, combined with the use of an aluminum electrical panel bus."

Dan Friedman
Educator, author, and building failures researcher
http://www.inspect-ny.com/fpe/fpepanel.htm

The following accounts were sent to Dan Friedman from electricians regarding their experience with Zinsco panels. Here are excerpts:

9/2/2003 *I was at a site to do an estimate and noticed a Zinsco panel. I asked the customer if it was alright to check it, and he agreed. He said the only trouble he knew about was the water heater didn't always give them real hot water. I pulled the panel cover off and everything looked okay. I checked the breakers with a volt meter, and it had proper voltage at all the circuits. Then, I started (carefully) removing breakers and found the top (water heater circuit) breaker had welded itself to the buss and came apart when I tried to remove it. (This could be very dangerous for a homeowner or home inspector!) I removed several other breakers and found them to be badly damaged, and the bussing was burnt in several locations. After seeing the situation it was not hard to convince the owner that it was time to replace the Zinsco panel.*

5/15/2003 *- I was asked to look at this customer's home to give them an estimate to replace a Zinsco panel. The panel looked okay, but when I removed some of the breakers, I found signs of degradation on the buss. The breaker next to it also had started deteriorating. They had not failed yet or caused the customer any noticeable problems. I then tried to remove another breaker, and it would not come out. The breaker was welded onto the buss so bad that the buss started to come out with the breaker. I pushed the breaker and buss back into place and let the customer know that he had a serious problem that needed to be addressed as soon as possible.*

For more information, contact MCC Electric at **www.mccelectric.ca/contact-mcc** or **(506)651-5168**