

Electrical Panels—Accessibility and Maintenance

Every building with power has electrical panels to control the flow of electricity throughout the structure. Since electrical hazards are among the most common safety hazards found during occupational safety and health inspections, facilities managers need to maintain the electrical panel to minimize electrical safety issues. This article discusses potential risks associated with electrical panels and how to mitigate them.

Risks

Electrical panels contain electrical currents, which can pose serious risks to people and structures. Age, corrosion, faulty installation and damage—including damage from water or rodents—can compromise the effectiveness of an electrical panel, resulting in:

- **Fire hazards**—A damaged or exposed electrical panel could lead to a fire, resulting in property damage, injuries or death.
- **Shock hazards**—Contact with a faulty electrical panel may result in severe injury or death from electrocution. Poorly labeled breakers can also lead to accidents involving people who are unaware power is surging through the panel.

Mitigating the Risk

Since electrical risks are threats to buildings and people, facilities managers must ensure that their electrical panels are consistently updated and maintained. The following are ways to mitigate electrical panel risks:

- **Keep clearance in front of the panels.** Safety issues can arise if employees aren't given adequate space to work, so keep the area in front of the electrical panel clear of any obstacles. Keeping this space—along with the areas above and on the sides of the

electrical panel—free of combustible materials will also help protect the property if electrical sparks do ignite. Consult the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [guidelines](#) for the minimum depth of clear working space, as well as local regulations. If possible, mark the floor with the proper panel clearance requirements to ensure the space remains unblocked and accessible.

- **Make sure any unused openings are properly plugged.** Covering knockouts or removed breakers will help prevent hot sparks from escaping and keep pests from entering. If pests are able to enter, they may complete the circuit inside the panel, leading to a short circuit, which can cause an arc flash.
- **Label the breakers.** Over time, breaker labels can become hard to read and inaccurate if they're not maintained. Keep breaker labels up to date and legible when changes are made.
- **Hire qualified electricians.** Electrical work can quickly become dangerous or deadly when performed by someone without the necessary knowledge or training. Only hire qualified, trained professionals to do electrical work to minimize safety and fire hazards.

Facilities managers should adequately maintain and update electrical panels to ensure that buildings remain safe. For more information, contact us today.

Provided by Carl Warren & Company

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