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Zinsco Breaker Panels: A Silent Hazard in Home Safety

A critical issue in the world of [home inspections](#) is relative safety across certain breaker panel brands. While Federal Pacific Electric (FPE) breaker panels are widely discussed for their safety issues, they aren't the only ones. Zinsco is another brand that's come under scrutiny due to its linkage to serious electrical hazards.

Zinsco breaker panels, which may also be labeled as "Zinsco-Sylvania" or "GTE-Sylvania-Zinsco" due to mergers and acquisitions over the years, have a unique design that has led to significant safety concerns. These panels can be identified by their color-coded circuit breaker handles and a distinctive Zinsco sticker. The primary function of a breaker panel is to prevent house fires, making it vital to identify and address any issues with electrical equipment that has a history of defects or failures.

Zinsco panels have been found to have similar safety issues as [FPE panels](#), such as circuit breakers failing to trip when necessary. This can lead to overheating, melting of the circuit breaker and even fires. Dr. Jesse Aronstein, an expert on breaker panel failures, has conducted extensive testing on Zinsco equipment and identified significant problems. The deterioration of bus bar plating over time in Zinsco panels can lead to poor connections and increased fire risk. These issues are often hidden from view, buried behind the circuit breakers.

J.P. Simmons, another electrical expert, found nearly 32% of tested Zinsco circuit breakers failed to trip as required. Additionally, 25% of Zinsco/Sylvania panels showed damage upon inspection. It's important to understand that a circuit breaker's primary role is to detect and respond to excessive current by tripping, essentially turning off the circuit. A failure to trip can lead to electrical overloads, risking damage to appliances, electric shock or fire.

Despite their age, Zinsco breaker panels are still occasionally found in homes. These panels are outdated by today's safety standards and considered antiquated in the electrical and home inspection industries. Home inspectors should inform their clients upon Zinsco breaker panel discovery about their potential risks and advise a full evaluation by a qualified electrician familiar with Zinsco equipment. Electricians often recommend replacing these panels. Even newer, Zinsco-style breakers, including those manufactured in China, are known to exhibit defects and fail to meet current safety standards.

As home inspectors, we regularly encounter a range of electrical systems and components. It's vital to stay informed about potential hazards like those associated with Zinsco breaker panels. For homeowners, realtors and fellow inspectors, awareness of these issues is key to ensuring the safety and integrity of our homes.

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[Zinsco Breaker Panels – The Often Overlooked Hazard \(wini.com\)](http://wini.com)