GFCI Check!

When did you last test your ground fault circuit interrupter? If you can't recall, the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) reminds consumers that it's a good idea to do so at least once a month and after electrical storms.

Ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) are electrical safety devices that trip electrical circuits when they detect leakage currents. A GFCI can be an electrical receptacle, circuit breaker, or portable device. They are especially useful for cord-connected appliances and equipment are used outdoors or near water.

Power surges and electrical storms may damage GFCIs, preventing them from working properly. Regularly testing GFCIs is a good safety practice.

The GFCI test is simple. Plug a nightlight into a GFCI-protected outlet and turn it on. Press the "TEST" button; the light should turn off. Press the "RESET" button; the light should turn on. If the light does not go out when the "TEST" button is pressed, discontinue use of this circuit and contact a qualified electrician to correct the problem.

Leakage currents occur when an electrical appliance is damaged or the electrical parts are wet and electrical current flows outside of the circuit conductors. If a person becomes part of the path for the leakage current, he or she will be shocked or electrocuted. GFCIs look for very small leakage currents and act quickly to shut off the circuit after detecting them. By interrupting the flow of electricity, GFCIs may prevent serious injury or death.

For more information on electrical safety, visit the ESFI Web site, www.electrical-safety.org