

## ESFI Creating Growth Opportunities by Promoting Safety

In the United States, electrical problems cause an average of 50,900 home fires each year, resulting in more than 490 deaths, 1,400 injuries and more than \$1.3 billion in property damage. Another 300 deaths and 4,000 injuries in the workplace are the result of electrical hazards. Every hour during the workday, a worker is hurt so severely from electricity that he or she requires time off from work for recovery.

Since 1994, the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) has been working to reduce these numbers and prevent unnecessary accidents by promoting electrical safety. ESFI, a 501(c)(3) organization, has become highly regarded by industry, media and consumer safety partners by constantly reinvigorating how electrical safety should be addressed and creating awareness resources and educational materials.

ESFI promotes advanced safety technology and awareness in the workplace and at home through its relationships with local and national media outlets. The Foundation has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Men's Health* magazine and on The Early Show on CBS. ESFI also provides third party validation by advocating for the adoption of legislation, codes and standards that improve electrical safety.

"What really differentiates us from any other organization out there is that we're that third party

validator," said Brett Brenner, president of ESFI.

"Whether it's a manufacturer, distributor, insurer, contractor or anybody up and down the supply chain, we can validate that what they say is true about things like shocks, fires, fatalities and injuries. We want to build more relationships with distributors and give them the opportunity to use our information to keep their customers safe—contractors, facility managers and homeowners."

Brenner believes that more people would purchase more safety devices like arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCI) if they better understand what those in the electrical industry do. The "do it yourself" movement has created a lot of hazards, and the electrical industry would benefit by selling the safety of the devices themselves and encouraging people to leave electrical work to the professionals.

"The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that AFCIs could prevent more than 50 percent of electrical fires, and we've seen a lot of positive upselling from distributors," points out Brenner. "As their customers better understand the products, they're able to leave behind valuable information and point people towards ESFI for an unbiased opinion about what an arc fault circuit interrupter can do. It increases safety in homes and the IMARK distributor sells more products."

IMARK members can play an important role in increasing safety and reducing property loss by educating contractors and facility professionals, keeping them updated about code changes, and reminding them of what steps they should take to ensure a safe workplace. ESFI encourages distributors to remind their customers to simply follow the rules and make sure they're wearing proper protective equipment. Focus on job planning and be sure to think through the entire job. Lock out and tag out anything that's supposed to be de-energized.

"The big thing that most people seem to feel they can't do is turn off the energy," said Brenner. "If there's no energy to deal with, you won't typically have a safety issue. Many times, people assume either something is off or they can't shut it down because it would cause interruption to the service. In that case, you're putting yourself in harm's way."

Because most homeowners are looking for more information before they pull the trigger and make a purchase, ESFI believes distributors should take advantage of this opportunity to educate contractors as they go into these homes so they can identify hazards and solutions for homeowners.

"Let's say a contractor is coming out to fix a light switch that's flickering," explains Brenner. "They can talk about dimmers and AFCIs. They can find out if there are children in the home and talk about tamper resistant receptacles, which prevent kids from sticking things in outlets and injuring themselves. If contractors were better schooled by distributors, everyone could probably sell more products and increase safety in homes. It's a win-win-win across the board."

A tamper resistant receptacle, or TRR, is safety technology that ESFI would like to see become more widespread. Every year in the United States, more than 2,400 children under the age of 10—nearly seven children each day—are treated in emergency rooms for electrical shock or burns caused by tampering with a wall outlet in the home. Nearly one third of these injuries are caused by children placing ordinary household objects into an outlet, whether it's a key, pin or paperclip.

A tamper resistant receptacle looks like any other outlet, but it's designed with a spring-loaded receptacle cover plate that closes off the receptacle openings and protects children from electrical injuries. TRRs have been required

in hospital pediatric care facilities for more than 20 years, but haven't been used much in homes until recently. The 2008 National Electric Code requires them to be installed in new home construction, but existing homes can be easily retrofitted with TRRs that cost just 50 cents more than a regular outlet.

"Many, many mothers who I've spoken to, and many of the people who we've engaged through social media, are surprised something so simple is out there," said Brenner. "They would be all for putting it in their homes but they just didn't know about it in the first place."

"I think there's an opportunity for a TRR, which is much less expensive than an AFCI, to be installed in homes. If IMARK distributors were to make things like this available in bulk, offer special pricing or do things to promote these safety items, they could really give some marketing power to their customers to push more products," he continued.

This is where ESFI can really help a distributor enhance their marketing and sales initiatives. Endless tools are available on their website ([www.ESFI.org](http://www.ESFI.org)), including tip sheets, checklists, statistics and virtual demonstrations. These tools and resources are completely free. Brenner explains:

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“For example, you could find out all you’d ever want to know about AFCIs. As a distributor, you can point a contractor to that information. You can have a contractor point the end consumer to that information to better understand what the technology does. We have this for pretty much every device down the line. That goes for everything from AFCIs and TRRs to portable generators and smoke alarms. It’s on the website for IMARK distributors to link to, or take and use as they wish.”

The virtual demonstrations that illustrate what a product is, how it works and how it keeps people safe are unique to ESFI. These videos, also found on the ESFI website, are powerful tools that can help distributors and their customers enhance marketing presentations by illustrating the value and effectiveness of a product.

Seasonal safety campaigns and co-branding opportunities are

available throughout the year. As we head into the holiday season, ESFI invites IMARK members to get onboard with their annual Make Safety A Tradition campaign. This will include an extensive PR and media outreach in print, social and broadcast media, along with new and updated safety resources, featuring a Holiday Safety Community Toolkit, public service announcements distributed nationally and a video package for use by media outlets.

“Electricity is such a big part of what makes the holidays as special as they are, but it’s also a big part of the danger of the holidays,” said Brenner. “We talk about things like cooking safety, decorating safety and fire safety, focusing on children. It’s a great way to show good will and social responsibility as a member of the community while building long-term relationships that are so important to any business.”

At the end of the day, it’s important to remember two things. First, an electrical distributor’s customer must be educated and well-prepared in order to sell the distributor’s product and develop strong relationships. Second, people do things and buy things that they feel are recommended by an expert who they trust and respect. A great way to earn that trust and respect is to show a genuine desire to improve the safety of that person’s business or family.

“Any kind of auxiliary material that a distributor can make available, whether it’s a website, brochure or checklist, provides opportunities to their customers who go out there and deal with the end consumer,” said Brenner. “Distributors who we work with see the value in helping the community become safer. This also creates opportunities to service the people who they’ve built long standing relationships with as new technologies emerge.”