ELECTRICIAN PROS — GUIDE

GFCI and AFCI rules: what to ask your electrician

Understand protection terms and check the code edition that applies to the job.

Updated November 10, 2026

Ask the contractor to explain both ground-fault protection and arc-fault protection in the quote. The names sound similar. They describe different protection functions. A device with a test button should not be identified by appearance alone. Record its model and follow its instructions.

Read code summaries with their limits

Leviton's Captain Code guide summarises changes to the NEC. Its kitchen section explains the expansion of dwelling kitchen GFCI protection beyond countertop receptacles. It describes the affected voltage range and supply conditions. See the linked change guide, checked 2026-11-10, for the full limits. Do not reduce this to a rule about every outlet in every building.

The guide also describes expanded AFCI coverage for fire, police, ambulance and similar occupancy areas. That is a specific change summary, not a complete list of residential AFCI requirements. Ask the contractor for the adopted code section that covers your room and scope.

A model code summary does not establish which edition a jurisdiction has adopted or how existing work is treated. Washington L&I's page names the NEC edition it uses for inspections. Check that official page and your permit authority again when planning the job. Canadian projects need the applicable provincial guidance; do not apply a US change summary as Canadian law.

What to ask for in a quote

Ask which circuits need GFCI protection, which need AFCI protection and where both functions are proposed. Ask how the selected devices match the panel and circuit arrangement. Request an explanation of testing, labelling and access after the work.

For a renovation, ask whether new wiring, an extension or a replacement changes the applicable requirements. If contractors disagree, send the same written scope to the permit office. Keep its answer. Do not decide solely from a product advertisement or a photograph.

Keep protection working

ESFI's Home Electrical Safety Challenge asks owners to test GFCIs and AFCIs monthly. We checked the checklist on 2026-11-10. Follow the device instructions and ask an electrician about a device that will not test or reset. The checklist is safety guidance, not a substitute for inspection or a legal determination.

If a device trips repeatedly, stop using the affected equipment and arrange diagnosis. Do not treat removal of the protection as a repair. Tell the electrician what was running and what

happened before the trip.

Sources

All sources below were fetched and checked on 2026-11-10. This is the check date, not a claim that each page was published that day.

- Leviton, Captain Code: NEC Code Changes. Checked 2026-11-10.
- Leviton, Captain Code NEC change guide, kitchen and other occupancy sections.pdf). Checked 2026-11-10.
- Electrical Safety Foundation, Home Electrical Safety Challenge. Checked 2026-11-10.
- Washington L&I, Electrical Permits, Fees & Inspections. Checked 2026-11-10.

Frequently asked questions

Does a safety checklist establish a code requirement?

No. Use the adopted code and the local authority for a compliance decision.

Can I replace a breaker to stop nuisance trips?

Ask an electrician to diagnose the cause and verify compatible protection. Do not bypass it.