

GFCI outlets

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) electric outlets are the outlets that typically have black and red test buttons on them (see Figure 1). Some older GFCI outlets have two white buttons, and some of the newer ones have buttons that are the same color as the outlet.

Outlets that get their electricity from a GFCI outlet are called protected outlets. For example, sometimes all the bathroom outlets are placed on the same circuit, with only one GFCI outlet providing electricity to the other bathroom outlets. Occasionally a GFCI outlet in the garage will protect outlets in the bathrooms. Such garage installations can be inconvenient, particularly in multi-story buildings, and possibly hazardous in darkness. In newer homes, the kitchen GFCI outlet will control other outlets in the kitchen (sometimes more than one GFCI outlet is present in the kitchen controlling other outlets). So if you don't have electricity at an outlet, look for a GFCI outlet in another location that might have tripped and disconnected electricity to the outlet.

GFCI or protected outlets typically are required at all exterior locations, as well as in the bathroom, kitchen, laundry, and garage. Safety outlets should also be present near all sources of water and near metal-encased appliances that do not have electric motors (such as a cooktop, oven, coffee maker, toaster, etc.). Any protected outlets should be labeled as protected outlets for the simple reason that if electricity is not present at the outlet, people will understand that they might need to check the GFCI outlet in another location before calling an electrician, thereby saving a service charge.

You should test the GFCI outlets as soon as you move in, noting at the same time any protected outlets that may be present and which GFCI outlets control those protected outlets. While protected outlets are supposed to be labeled as such, that typically is not the case since the label is usually paper and, being in high moisture areas (bathrooms, kitchens, etc.), they get wet and fall off. The labels are not exactly designer labels, either, so many home owners simply remove them.

Although GFCI outlets are proven life-saving devices, they are known to fail on a regular basis and should be tested monthly to ensure that they are functioning properly. To test the GFCI outlet, first plug a nightlight or lamp into the outlet. Turn the light on and press the "TEST" button on the outlet. The "RESET" button should pop out, and the light should go out. If the GFCI outlet is functioning properly, meaning that the light goes out, press the "RESET" button to restore power to the outlet. If the "RESET" button pops out but the light does not go out, either the GFCI outlet is not working properly or it is incorrectly wired. Call a qualified electrician to evaluate the problem.

If GFCI outlets trip regularly, consult a qualified electrician immediately to determine why the tripping is occurring. GFCI outlets trip quite often when hair dryers are used on the circuit due to the electrical surge typically needed to start the dryer. If you notice this happening, try starting the dryer on the lowest setting and then moving up to the higher setting after a few seconds. That might resolve the problem, but any outlets that trip on a regular basis can indicate electrical problems, either with the outlet, the circuit, or the appliance plugged into that outlet. Have a qualified electrician evaluate the situation as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about anything, simply [Contact us](#)

**REAL ESTATE
SOLUTIONS**

provided by

1st Choice Property Inspectors

Chuck Yeza

Concord, Ohio

440-667-8458



cyezza@roadrunner.com

www.1stcpi.com



Figure 1. Typical GFCI safety outlet.