

## “KEEPING PACE” - #79

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### ELECTRICAL SURGE OR COOKING FIRE?

Sometimes the burner controls on the front of a range are too badly damaged by the ensuing fire to allow analysis of their shaft positions, to see if any were “On” at the time of the fire. The above photograph is a view from the inside of the control panel in a kitchen range. It shows the rear of two of the burner controls. The arrow points to one of the burner controls whose shaft is rotated approximately 30°, which places it in the “High” position. This fact, coupled with a significant blue coloration on the chrome colored shield below the same burner element, led me to conclude this was a cooking fire.

The owner of the house claimed that power surges had caused her to replace all the lamp bulbs in her dining room twice in the week prior to the fire. She wanted to blame the electrician and/or the electric utility for this fire. However, I proved they were not at fault.

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### THREE CHILDREN DIE IN HOUSE FIRE IN SAGINAW, MICHIGAN:

The photograph shows a special kind of heater for heating hair curling irons. This same type of heater was found behind a freezer where a fire originated. The smoke from the ensuing fire killed three children sleeping upstairs in their house. Two short circuit locations were found in the heater's power cord, and the plaintiff attorney blamed these as the cause of the fire. He also blamed a 20 ampere circuit breaker for being installed where a 15 ampere should have been. I was retained to represent the electrician who had installed the wiring.

Upon energizing the identical heater shown, I measured its surface temperature to be in excess of 550° Fahrenheit using an electronic thermometer. Since the subject heater was plugged in and turned on at the time of the fire, I concluded that it had ignited adjacent clothing on top of the freezer (clothing requires only 400°-450° to ignite). After the fire began, the heater was blown behind the freezer by the pressure from the water hoses used during the fire fight.

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