FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Why is my electrical panel buzzing?

Common causes of panel noise

If your electrical panel is making a buzzing, humming, or crackling noise, don't ignore it. While some very faint humming can be normal, a noticeable buzzing sound often signals a loose connection, overloaded circuit, or failing breaker.

The most common cause is a loose breaker connection on the bus bar, which can create buzzing, crackling, vibrating sounds, and heat buildup. An overloaded circuit can cause internal arcing, and if the buzzing gets louder when certain appliances turn on, that is a clue. A failing breaker can buzz under load, feel warm, or trip randomly.

- [ ] A loose breaker connection on the bus bar (most common)
- [ ] An overloaded circuit causing internal arcing
- [ ] A failing or defective breaker
- [ ] Outdated panels such as Federal Pacific, Zinsco, Pushmatic, or fuse panels

Is a buzzing panel dangerous?

It can be. Electrical buzzing often means electricity is not flowing cleanly. When connections aren't tight, heat builds up, and heat plus electrical current is a potential fire hazard.

A very faint, steady hum is sometimes normal. Noticeable buzzing, crackling, or sizzling means you should call an electrician. A burning smell or visible damage means you should turn off power and call immediately.

What to do if your panel is buzzing

Do not open the panel and do not try to tighten breakers yourself; panels contain live components even when the main breaker is off. Avoid running heavy-load appliances and call a licensed electrician to inspect it.

Older panels built before the 1990s often were not designed for today's power demands, and if yours is aging and buzzing, it may be time for a full panel evaluation or upgrade.

- [ ] Do not open the panel
- [ ] Do not tighten breakers
- [ ] Avoid running heavy-load appliances
- [ ] Call a licensed electrician to inspect it

Frequently asked questions

Is a slight humming noise normal?

Sometimes transformers or normal electrical flow can produce a faint hum. Loud buzzing, crackling, or sizzling is not normal and should be inspected, since it often points to a loose connection or arcing.

Can a buzzing panel cause a fire?

Yes, if it's caused by loose connections or arcing. When connections aren't tight, heat builds up, and heat combined with electrical current is a potential fire hazard. A noticeably buzzing panel should be evaluated promptly.

Should I turn off the main breaker?

If you smell burning or see signs of overheating, yes, but only if it is safe to do so. Otherwise, avoid running heavy-load appliances and call a licensed electrician to inspect the panel rather than opening it yourself.

Sources

1. Home Electrical Fires, Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). https://www.esfi.org/home-electrical-fires/
2. Electrical Safety (safety tip sheet), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/project/storefront/catalog/files/safety-tip-sheets/electricalsafetytips.pdf

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/panel-buzzing-noise/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

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