

CAN YOU TRUST THE LABEL ON AN ELECTRICAL PANEL?

Combined carousel summary

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

1/10

CAN YOU TRUST THE LABEL ON AN ELECTRICAL PANEL?

A label is a clue. It is not proof.

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

2/10

LABELS CHANGE LAST

Systems change first.

- Loads move
- Spare breakers get reused
- Temporary wiring stays
- Drawings and field labels drift apart

A label may have been right once.

ORIGINAL

AFTER MODIFICATIONS

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

3/10

“SPARE” IS NOT PROOF

It may still feed a real load.

- Trace heater circuits
- Check receptacles
- Look for local panels
- Check tracing circuits
- Review recent modifications

Never assume unused just because it says SPARE.

PANELBOARD: LP1

CKT	DESCRIPTION	AMPS	POLES
7	LIGHTS	20	1
8	RECEPTACLES	20	1
9	HVAC-1	30	2
10	HVAC-2	30	2
11	SPARE	20	1
12	SPARE	20	1
13	—	—	—
14	—	—	—

FIELD LOAD

TRACE HEAT

MARKED SPARE, ACTUALLY IN USE

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

4/10

RIGHT NAME, WRONG CIRCUIT

What exactly does this breaker disconnect?

- Motor?
- Space heater?
- Control transformer?
- Auxiliary panel?

A familiar equipment tag can create false confidence.

PANEL LP1
CKT 12

MOTOR

SPACE HEATER

CONTROL TRANSFORMER

AUXILIARY PANEL

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

5/10

ONE BREAKER MAY NOT KILL ALL POWER

Look for every energy source.

- Main AC
- Control power
- UPS-backed supply
- 24VDC
- Possible backfeed

One label rarely shows the whole energy picture.

MAIN AC

CONTROL POWER

UPS-BACKED SUPPLY

24 VDC

POSSIBLE BACKFEED

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

6/10

COMPARE. DO NOT GUESS.

Check more than one source.

- Panel schedule
- Single-line diagram
- Cable identification
- Recent modifications

If documents disagree, that is a finding.

PANEL SCHEDULE - LP1

SINGLE-LINE DIAGRAM

CABLE INFORMATION

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

7/10

THE FIELD TELLS THE TRUTH

Documents show what should exist.

- Cable tags
- Feeder route
- Local disconnect
- Equipment nameplate
- Source / destination markings

Field evidence increases confidence.

PANEL LP1

CABLE TAGS

LOCAL DISCONNECT

DESTINATION EQUIPMENT

ELECTRICAL FIELD NOTES

8/8

FIELD RULE:

LABEL → VERIFY → W

- Compare the panel label, schedule, and drawings.
- Confirm the actual destination equipment.
- Check for AC, DC, UPS, and backfeed sources.
- Follow approved LOTO and verify absence of voltage.

A label is a clue. It is not proof.

Blog companion PDF

Full article: ElectricalFieldNotes.com

FIELD CHECKLIST

Before trusting an electrical panel label

Use this checklist before isolation, troubleshooting, or maintenance work involving a breaker label, panel schedule, or circuit identification.

Documentation & identification

- ☐ Confirm the panel designation and breaker number.
- ☐ Compare with the panel schedule.
- ☐ Check the single-line diagram.
- ☐ Check cable identification where applicable.
- ☐ Confirm the destination equipment.

Sources & safe isolation

- ☐ Look for separate AC, DC, UPS, or control supplies.
- ☐ Consider possible backfeed sources.
- ☐ Review recent system modifications.
- ☐ Follow approved LOTO and isolation procedures.
- ☐ Verify absence of voltage where required.

REMEMBER

A label is a clue. It is not proof. The correct sequence is Label → Verify → Work.