

Electrical - Frequently Asked Questions

Why do the lights seem to blink or dim temporarily when I use the outlets in the House?

General lighting outlets are throughout your home. They are meant for low current type uses, such as lamps, radios, or clocks. When large cord-connected motors are plugged in, such as a vacuum, the startup surge current for the motor can cause the lights, which are on the same circuit, to blink or dim. All circuits have potential for this occurrence. To minimize dimming, plug the large load items into circuits dedicated for this, such as any kitchen, dining room, nook, laundry room or bathroom outlets.

Why does the breaker trip so easily?

All circuits in the panel operate on the same principle. A 15 amp circuit has 1800 watts available. A 20 amp circuit has 2400 watts available. A typical 13 amp vacuum uses at least 1200 watts. If the wattage is exceeded while in use, it will cause an overload and "trip" the breaker. The same applies to the kitchen. The small appliance circuit is 20 amps or 2400 watts. When two or more items are in use, such as a toaster and coffee pot, the breaker can easily trip. When the breaker trips, it is actually doing its job. Split up or balance the loads. Move the second item to another circuit.

Why do some of the switches not turn anything on?

Some switches operate only on a switched outlets intended for lamps and other electronics. It may also be a "pre-wire" for a future paddle fan or light that was requested.

Why do the top plugs on some of the outlets not work?

If a room does not have an overhead light, it will usually have a switched outlet. The switched outlet is meant for a lamp. A light switch on the wall will control the switched outlet. When the switch is in the "on" position, the outlet will have power and turn on whatever is plugged in to it.

Why does the whole house fan come on by itself or seem not to work?

Most whole house fans are on a 24-hour timer system. The whole house fan comes on to remove the stale air in your home. Most timers have an "auto" position where the fan works on a timer, a "manual" position where the fan stays on all the time, and an "off" position where it will never run until it is turned on to one of the other positions. Make sure that the timer is set to "auto" and then set the time(s) during the day wished for it to run.

Why do the shower can lights or other can lights quit working?

All cans have a thermal cutout (heat sensor). When a bulb is installed that has too high of a wattage rating, it could overheat the can. The thermal cutout turns power off to the can to prevent overheating conditions. When it cools, power is restored to the can and the light will come back on. This cycle will continue until the correct bulb and wattage is installed. Refer to the inside of the can for this information.

Why did a light that has worked quit working or works intermittently?

After a light bulb has been changed a few times, the tab in the bottom of the socket can be bent flat and is no longer making good contact with the new light bulb. With the power off, gently pry this tab back up again to make contact with the light bulb.

Why did my driveway post light quit working?

Most post lights are protected by a GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) outlet in the garage. Check and reset this outlet first. If this does not solve the problem, check the breaker that controls it. Also try

checking the bulb on the post light. Sometimes a bulb is burnt out or is not making contact in the back of the socket. Double-check to make sure there is contact. One way to test this during the day is to put a piece of dark tape over the photocell and wait for ten minutes. If it is working properly, the light will come on usually within five to seven minutes. If there is an override switch, it must be in the “on” position for this to work. Also, a buildup of bugs and/or debris may clog the socket causing the GFCI to trip and the bulb to burn out prematurely.

Why do my smoke detectors chirp?

A chirping smoke detector indicates that the batteries need to be replaced. The batteries should be replaced every year regardless of whether they chirp or not. Pick a day, such as daylight saving time to remind you that it is time.

Why are the bedroom lights or outlets not working?

All the lights and outlets in bedrooms are protected by AFCI (Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter) breakers. This is a special breaker that is installed in the electrical panel. If the lights or outlets in any of the bedrooms are not working, check the electrical panel to see if any of the AFCI breakers are tripped. If they are, reset the breaker.

Why did the kitchen, dining room or nook outlets quit working?

These outlets are protected by a GFCI outlet. When there is a problem with a device plugged into the GFCI outlet, it will trip. To resume power to all the outlets on that circuit press the reset button on the outlet. If the GFCI does not reset, try unplugging all of the items that are plugged into the outlets on that circuit and then reset the GFCI. If this does not activate power, check your electrical panel in the garage. Find the breaker responsible for the area of the house that has no power and reset that breaker.

Why did the bathroom outlets quit working?

These outlets are GFCI protected and should be checked and reset in the same manner as above.

Why did the outside weatherproof outlets quit working?

This outlet is GFCI protected and is located in the weather proof cover on the outside of your home. In some cases the outlet is protected by the GFCI in the garage. Remember that if the inoperable outlet is up high, such as a Christmas eve outlet, there is often a light switch in the garage for them. The switch needs to be “on” in order for the outlet to work. Weatherproof outlets are not dedicated outlets; they are easily overloaded by outside appliances such as electric garden tools.

Why did the garage outlets quit working?

The general convenience receptacle in the garage is GFCI protected and should be checked and reset in the same manner as stated above. Plugging large, heavy-duty electric motors into this outlet can overload and/or exceed the capacity of the circuit. Adding a dedicated circuit to run specialized heavy-duty tools in the garage can be easily done by an electrician and will eliminate the problem.

Why is there no power to a circuit and/or multiple lights are dead in my house?

Check your electrical panel in the garage for any tripped circuit breakers. To properly reset a circuit breaker, first turn it off (this will be a stiff click), then turn it back on. Occasionally a breaker trips, but does not necessarily move the breaker switch to the off position. It must be switched off and back on to reset the tripped breaker.

Why has half of the house or more lost power?

First check to see if any of the circuit breakers have tripped and reset them if so. Directions for resetting circuit breakers are outlined above. If that doesn't correct the problem, it may be that the house has lost a power wire or neutral from the power company. To check this, turn on the clothes dryer, oven, or another 220 volt appliance. If the power works but the oven does not heat up, immediately contact the serving power utility company for repair and/or service. Wind and storms are another source of power outages and the serving power utility company should be called for repair and/or service for these items as well.