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To add switches, plugs, go fish

(AP) — Have you wondered how you might add a switch, light or receptacle to your home with all those finished walls, ceilings and floors concealing the wiring? Well, take heart. With a little careful measuring and a complement of luck, you can easily "fish" cable through ceiling and wall cavities, and with little or no drywall repair.

Fishing cable, as it's known, is not new. Electricians have been upgrading electrical systems in this manner for years, and you can do it, too. Although the job is time-consuming it's not that difficult.

In many cases all you need to fish electrical wire are a cut-in box, sheathed cable, a screwdriver, utility knife, and drywall. In some cases a length of ash chain is handy.

For a short run, a piece of coat-hanger wire will serve as a fish tape. For longer reaches, a factory-made fish tape will save you hours of frustration. It costs about \$20.

Fish tape is a thin, coiled steel ribbon that has a hook on one end. It's rigid enough to push through a wall cavity yet flexible enough to make tight radius bends.

Some circuits are easy to expand. If you want to add an interior living

room wall, check the wall's back first. In many cases, you can pull power from a bedroom receptacle on the wall's opposite side.

To do this, start by measuring carefully from a common feature on the wall, such as a door. The existing receptacle box will be mounted on a stud. The new box, known as a cut-in box, will not be mounted on a stud.

To determine where to put the cut-in box, poke a putty knife between the outside of the receptacle box and the edge of the drywall. Do this on both sides of the box. The putty knife will go in up to the stud on one side, but on the other side it will not hit the stud. This is the side on which you install the cut-in box.

On the opposite side of the wall, mark and cut the opening for the cut-in box a few inches from the existing box. Run the wire from the existing box to the opening. Push the wires through the cut-in box and install the box in its opening. Now install the receptacle in the box, and check that the receptacle is working properly before installing the cover plate.

When extending the cable along a wall, in most cases, you will have to run the cable from the basement or the attic. Which way you run the

cable depends on which is unfinished. If both are unfinished, it's generally easier to work from the basement.

If you work in the attic, you'll need to move the insulation aside to find the top of the walls through which the wall will run parallel to the ceiling joists or perpendicular to them. If it runs parallel to the joists, look for a drywall nailer (two 2-by-4s or one 2-by-8) that appears to lay on top of the drywall. A wall perpendicular to the joists is evident from the horizontal 2-by-4 that forms the top of the wall.

After measuring carefully from a reference point, bore one hole to tap into the circuit and another to run the cable. Next, lower an 8-foot-long ash chain into the stud space from above. Secure the chain with a pair of locking pliers.

Poke the fish tape through the box opening (the one you are pulling power from) and snag the dangling chain. Pull the chain into the box, and attach the new cable to it. Pull the cable into the attic. From the attic, feed the cable into the next hole, and push it down to the new opening.

Do not lay cable on top of the ceiling joists. If the cable runs across a joist, bore a hole through the joist and run the cable through the hole. If the cable runs parallel to a joist, staple the cable to the joist's side. Space staples 4 feet apart.

When working from the basement, instead of using a chain to gain access to the existing box, push the fish tape into the stud space from the basement and snag it through the box with a coat hanger. Then use the fish tape to pull the cable through the box and into the basement.

By Popular Mechanics for AP Special Features

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Mortgage rates average 7.44%

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thirty-year, fixed rate mortgages averaged 7.44 percent this week, down from 7.45 percent last week, according to a national survey released Thursday by the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

It was the lowest since Oct. 10, when rates hit a 20-month low of 7.38 percent. Rates have fallen since a high of 9.25 percent the week of Nov. 23, 1994.

On one-year adjustable rate mortgages, lenders were asking an average initial rate of 5.67 percent, down from 5.73 percent last week.

Fifteen-year mortgages, a popular option for those refinancing mortgages, averaged 6.97 percent this week, down from 7.01 percent a week earlier.

The rates do not include add-on fees known as points.

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