

AROUND THE HOUSE

Don't be confused about fuses

The son has his new compact disc blasting in his bedroom as he plays a Nintendo game. The teenage daughter is blow drying her hair as she watches "Beauty and the Beast" for the umpteenth time. There are clothes in the dryer and the air conditioning is on. A pot of stew is simmering on the electric range, and Dad is watching the final "Jeopardy" question ... when the fuse blows! The only problem is that Mom is working late at the office and she's the only one who has ever changed a fuse. Sound familiar?

band that is visible through the glass base and screw into a fuse socket; circuit breakers look like switches.

If the lights go out or the appliance or tool stops operation, you probably blew a fuse or tripped a circuit breaker. Switch off the appliance or tools that were running. Then go to the panel box, open the cover and look for the glass fuse with the black burn mark in the center. There is a lead strip about 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch long. If you can see an intact lead strip, this isn't the fuse that is blown.

Unscrew the burnt-out fuse and replace it with the same size, or rating, fuse. The fuses are color-coded and numbered as follows: Blue fuses are 15 amps, red or orange fuses are 20 amps and green fuses are 30 amps.

It's also important to note that the fuses in the sockets could be the wrong size. On most home inspections we perform, we will find overfused circuits, which is a potential safety hazard. To find out, you need an electrician to remove the cover and check the wire sizes. The following will indicate which fuse sizes are needed: 14-gauge wire = 15 amps, 12-gauge wire = 20 amps, 10-gauge wire = 30 amps.

Normally, 14-gauge wire is the smallest wire in the panel; 12-gauge wire is a

little thicker and 10-gauge is a little thicker still and is normally used on 240-volt circuits. You may be able to read the wire size on the outer insulation of the wire, or you can buy a wire gauge from the local electrical supply store for just a few dollars.

We don't recommend that you unscrew the panel box to look at the wire sizes. You can open the front of the panel box without fear of a shock. If, however, you unscrew the cover off the

panel box, you run a considerable chance of getting a shock. You can also get a shock by sticking your finger in the fuse sockets. Only qualified electricians should make repairs or alterations to electrical systems and their components.

Around the House, by the AmeriSpec home inspection service, 1378 S. Main in Plymouth, instructs homeowners about the basics of home maintenance and repair.



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