



Reversed Polarity in our Homes

What is Reverse Polarity and why is it important?

As a community with a code compliance program for over 30 years, often village inspectors commonly see electrical circuits improperly wired. Improper wiring can lead to many complications, even fires.

What is reversed polarity? Simply stated, it is a receptacle, commonly referred to as an outlet, which is wired backwards. You probably wouldn't know that a receptacle was wired backwards because they still provide power to your devices, but it can be dangerous or damage sensitive equipment under certain conditions.

Many electrical appliances, devices and lighting fixtures are specifically designed, tested and manufactured to allow current to flow through them in a specific manner. For example, in a standard table lamp the outer brass section (known as the socket) that the bulb screws into is wired to the neutral side of a receptacle. The inner contact of the socket is wired to the hot side of a receptacle. When you plug a lamp into a receptacle with reversed polarity, the outer brass section of the socket is now hot, and the inner contact is neutral. The light will function normally, but you can receive a shock by touching the brass socket.

Proper receptacle and device wiring can be achieved by following a few general rules of thumb. Your hot conductor (wire- typically black or red) should be attached to the copper colored screw. Just think, Hot Cop Hot Cop Hot Cop, for hot to copper. The neutral conductor (wire- white) should be attached to the silver screw.

Another sound way of determining polarity on a receptacle is by looking at the face of the receptacle. The smaller or shorter slot is always the hot side, while the larger or taller side is the neutral side.

While homeowners are allowed to change receptacles and make repairs, village inspectors suggest contacting a qualified electrical contractor for more challenging repairs or installations.