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# Top Reasons to Update Your Electrical Outlets & Wall Plates in your Home Office

Don't Set Yourself Up for Disaster

By Shane Weaver, Product Specialist, CableOrganizer.com

When my home office's decor is feeling a little too bland and familiar, the first thing I do to spice the place up is replace the wall outlet plates. I'm sure you feel the same way. What's that? You don't? You've never even taken a second look at your wall outlet plates, have you? If not, you're missing out on that added touch that you can only really get by replacing your boring old beige outlet plates with hot pink ones. Those exist, right? Nevertheless, boring as your wall plates may be, by not taking a second look at them to see if they need replacing, you could be setting yourself up for a very real disaster that could affect you, specifically. Below, I'll clue you in on when the time is right to change up your wall plates.

1. Crack Kills! (and gaps too)
2. Installation Frustration
3. It's Getting' Hot in Here
4. Building a Better Mousetrap... I Mean, Wall Outlet
5. Flip This Home Office (& Wall Plates!)
6. Watch As I Make This Outlet... Disappear!

Here's the 411:

## 1. Crack Kills

Cracked outlet plates will likely become dust traps and, ultimately, fire hazards. This is also the case for gaps created by undersized wall plates (gaps above 4.5mm also increase the chances of short-circuits). Lint, dust, and hair act as kindling when they accumulate, and electrical outlets are primo accumulation

**"It's hard to overstate the danger that dust and other household detritus can cause when too much accumulates in one place, especially when that place is next to a bunch of electrical wires."**

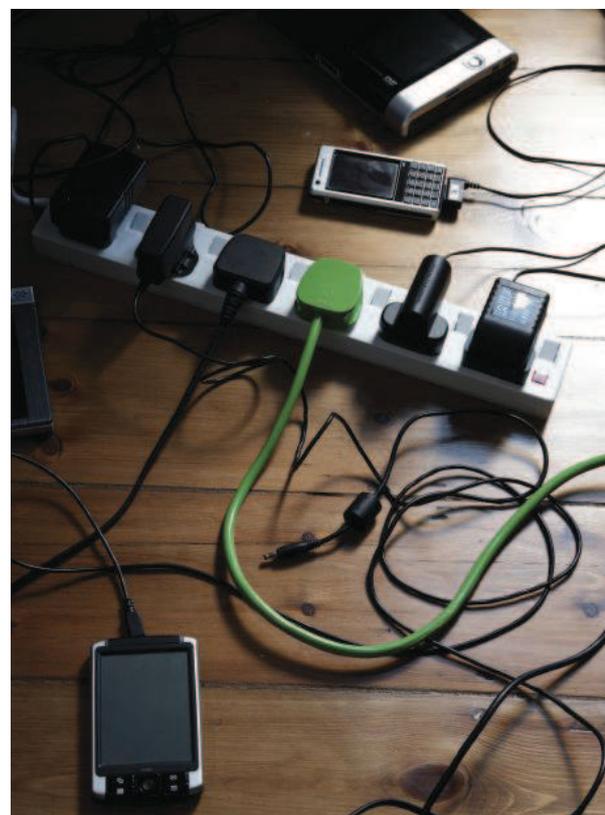
spots. In addition to fires, under the right conditions dust can actually cause explosions. Dust can also clog up the outlet. You know how when too much hair gets in the shower drain, it leaves you standing in ankle deep scummy water? Imagine that, but with more your-house-burning-down. It's hard to overstate the danger that dust and other household detritus can cause when too much accumulates in one place, especially when that place is next to a bunch of electrical wires.

So what can you do to save yourself from a future crisis? Replace cracked or undersized wall plates or even splurge and get your hands on some GFCI Outlets. So where should you start when replacing these? Well, hotter appliances are more likely to cause a fire. Are you a gamer? Video gaming equipment ranks pretty high here, as they are often stored together, next to other electronic equipment that is rarely if ever switched off. If you have a home theater set-up, make sure you have a shelving unit that allows each device to be placed on its own shelf with adequate cooling to avoid overheating. Otherwise, those fires you're setting in *Grand Theft Auto V* (GTA5) *might* end up being a little too real.

## 2. Installation Frustration

We all know that contractors are all fine, upstanding, ladies and gentlemen and would never do anything less than the best possible job. Still, what can you do if you're that one in five billion case who ends up being the victim of a badly done remodel? Not to worry: There are simple solutions that can help you make the best of someone else's cut corners. Here are some things to look for that might mean a wall plate needs to be replaced:

*Painted over light switches or outlet plates.* Sometimes when you're painting a room, you take your time, tape off the edges, and make sure you do it right. And sometimes, you just paint everything. Hinges, doorknobs, outlet plates, carpets, whatever. If your contractor



Installing an electrical outlet that has a built-in tester and surge protection could help prevent future scary predicaments.

was in the latter type of mood during your last remodel, you may want to check and see if your wall plates have been painted over.

*Burned or clearly charred outlet.* Sometimes your outlet cover looks all burnt and brown and gross. You should totally replace that wall

**"Your outlets are probably the same ones that came with your house, and if they're over 25 years old, you're seriously missing out on all of the amazing new outlet technology out there."**

cover. Why does it look like that? You might have a hot wire that isn't grounded. That means that the outlet may need to be rewired, or replaced entirely. When doing so, installing an electrical outlet that has a built-in tester and surge protection could help prevent future scary predicaments. And while you're at it, replace that wall plate, too!

## 3. It's Getting' Hot in Here

Remember what I said up there about charred

*Continued on page 48*

## Wall Plates Galore



The styles and colors available for wall plates are almost limitless: antique, steel, brass, nickel, nylon, plastic, outdoor weather proof, matte, gloss, oversize dimensions...I know I mentioned hot pink wall plates up there as a joke, but it turns out they totally exist!

You could get a wall plate with decorative patterns or designs, like one with dogs if you like dogs, or one with cats if you like cats. I'm sure if you look long and hard enough, you can find something that strikes your fancy before you lose your mind.

Just make sure if you're installing a plate in outdoor areas that you get something waterproof that can stand up to the wear and tear of weather, and lower the risk of electrocution. **HBM**

outlets? While you're checking your plates, you might want to check for overheating. If you find scorching or soot around the connection slots, it's most likely caused by the outlet being worn-out, rather than bad electrical wiring.

If you find the plate is warm and the screws holding the plate to the wall are hot to the touch, this is a sure sign of overheating. You're probably running too much power through the outlet, and it'd be a good idea to install outlets that are able to handle a larger load. Certain devices like hair dryers or curling irons can cause a wall plate to get slightly warm — that's normal. But when your screws are hot, that's when you know you're running too much power

Lastly, if you see that tell-tale scorching, you'll want to rule out candles as a culprit.

Candles with metal strands woven into their wicks release a black soot-like substance that can adhere to surfaces. When in contact with your plate and outlet, it can cause your outlet to heat up because it's unable to adequately cool down due to that extra layer of yucky soot.

## 4. Building a Better Mousetrap...I Mean, Wall Outlet

Honestly, if you're like pretty much everyone, you only think about your wall outlets when you have to plug something in, and even then you probably forget about them as soon as you've plugged in your iPads or Gameboys or whatever the kids are plugging in these days. But think about it. Your outlets are probably the same ones that came with your house, and if they're over 25 years old, you're seriously missing out on all of the amazing new outlet technology out there. Is your phone 25 years old? Your computer? Your TV? Of course not. In fact, you might have one device that serves the purpose of all of those things I just mentioned. Outlets aren't antique furniture or good scotch. And there's a world of choices out there for you. Tired of needing a USB adapter to charge your phone? Install an outlet and

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plate that includes the USB chargers *right in the wall*. It doesn't stop there — phone jacks, fiber, multi-port connectors, dimmer controls that adjust lighting on different sides of the room, or pre-fixed mood lighting mixes. Need multi-ganged plates? You can install plates with up to 6 ports.

**“If you find the plate is warm and the screws holding the plate to the wall are hot to the touch, this is a sure sign of overheating.”**

**5. Flip This Home Office (& Wall Plates!)**

Let's say you want to sell your house, or condo, or storage unit you've been living in. You want to put your best foot forward. While serious remodeling and updating rooms can be costly, updating your wall outlet plates is a simple and cheap way to help get your place ready for the market. You might not care too much if your wall plates are cracked or ill-fitting, but

I assure you any potential home buyer will. If you can't even keep a simple wall outlet looking nice, how do you treat the rest of your house? Leaving older wall plates that may be damaged, old looking, or worn out may cause you to lose money or downgrade your home when put on the market for selling. Although they may be small, they play an important role on how your home and rooms look to prospective buyers.

**6. Watch As I Make This Outlet... Disappear!**

If you have decided you no longer need an outlet or switch, you can seal off the gap with a blank faceplate that can match the rest of your decor or the color of your wall depending on your preference. Blank faceplates are simply as their name describes them. They are blank plates that are designed without any holes that can be installed over the outlets to cut off access to them completely. Generally, blank faceplates are designed in a neutral color, which helps to easily match with the surrounding room without drawing attention to it.

There you have it! Hopefully now you'll see those poor, neglected outlets around your house in a whole new light! And then, once



**Cracked outlet plates will likely become a dust trap and, ultimately, a fire hazard.**

you've replaced them, you can plug all your whole new lights into them! **HBM**

Shane Weaver is a Product Specialist at CableOrganizer.com—an industry-leading online retailer of telecom/datacom/networking, electrical, and cable and wire management products. He may be reached online at [www.CableOrganizer.com](http://www.CableOrganizer.com). *Home Business Magazine* readers can vote for their favorite Style of Wall Outlet Covers for a chance to win an iPad mini! Visit: <http://www.cableorganizer.com/giveaway>.

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