

Why Trust Anyone Else?

Reverse Polarity Outlet Explained

Newer residential receptacle outlets have three holes, for plug prongs. The single round one is for the ground, and the other two are for actual electricity flow. One of these two prongs is referred as the 'hot', the supply of electricity. The other is the 'neutral' or the 'return'. The hot can shock. The neutral, on a properly wired system, shouldn't be able to shock. So, many appliance manufacturers who don't include a grounding prong (the round hole), make sure that the supply of electricity only applies in a certain direction. Most outlets are clearly marked on the back "white wire" over or near the silver screws.

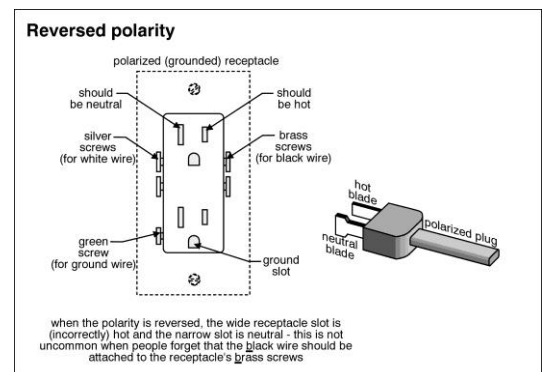
As an example lets use a table lamp, most bulb holders are metal, and when you change the bulb you see small brass tab (contact) at the base of the socket holder that touches the center of the bulb socket.



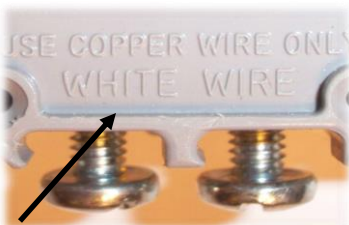
If you turn on the electricity, the flow of current should be from the tab, through the bulb and out of the socket base. Should the polarity be reversed, then the current would flow from the socket base, through the bulb, and out the tiny spot at the bottom. Now if you turn off the lamp, the socket holder can remain energized, the switch only controls current flow to the tiny spot (contact). So if you were to touch the socket and 'grounded' yourself, you could have electricity flow through you. Therefore if you have a choice, you want the smallest part of the lamp to always be the hot side. This is why some prongs are fatter than others, so you can't install a plug in reverse.

Now if your receptacle outlet has a reverse polarity problem, installing the plug correctly still applies a reverse polarity on your appliance, this case the lamp, now you are at risk of shock. So a reverse polarity outlet can be dangerous.

An outlet with a reverse polarity problem needs to be rewired. This doesn't require a lot of work, assuming the service panel is wired correctly. Just that the receptacle needs the hot and neutral supply wires swapped. Although this is not a difficult task, Honest Home Inspections feel that only qualified electricians should work on electrical circuits.



A reverse polarity outlet receptacle can be dangerous, yet can be fixed easily. This problem usually does not exist with newer homes, but with older ones. It seems more and more "Do It Yourselves" are feeling comfortable working with electricity, and they do their own work without knowing the impact of what they are actually doing. Failure to attach the white wires to the silver screws (see photo) causes the wires to become swapped, and a reverse polarity problem could be generated.



Why is this supplement being supplied to me? This information is more than likely being supplied because the home you have hired Honest Home Inspections, LLC to inspect has been found to have reverse polarity outlets and Honest Home Inspections cares about your safety and wants you to be informed.