

Painting 101: Do NOT paint electrical outlets!

Growing up, my Mom always painted everything... in fact I don't know that I have ever seen my dad hold a paint brush (unless of course, it is his cooking paint brush to lather on some more of his marinade). But as a result of my Mother's savvy interior painting skills, I have learned a thing or two that I just assumed (which you know what they say about that) everyone knew... Yeah... Apparently not! So in case you already know this important tip, bear with me!

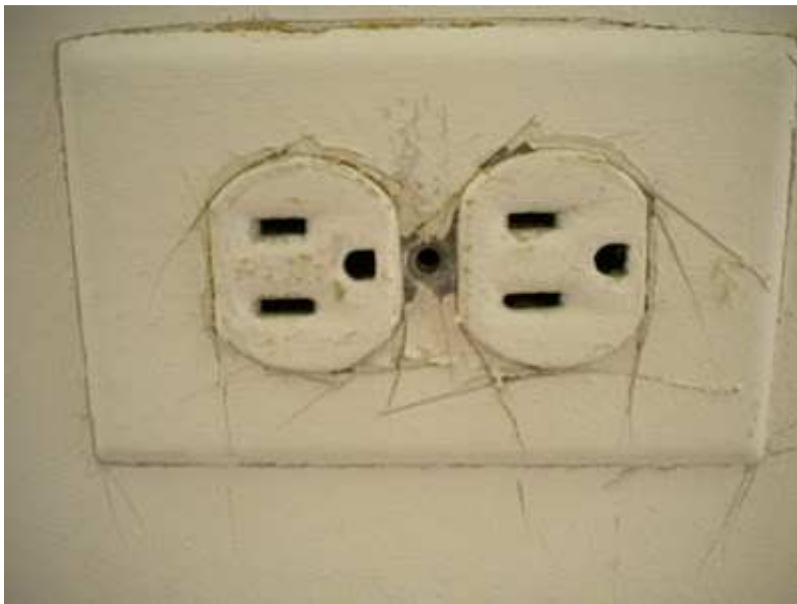
While I was painting my new place this weekend, we wanted to take the electrical plates off of the wall to make sure that we didn't get any paint on them... only to find out that every SINGLE one had been painted over... and I don't just mean one coat, I mean layers upon layers! So much so, that some outlets couldn't even be used anymore because the plugs wouldn't fit! My mom and I literally stared in disbelief! How is this possible?! So we had a choice to make, either paint over them again or replace them all... so we replaced them all. Now some of you might not see why replacing them was really the only option... YOU NEVER EVER paint an electrical outlet... EVER!

Here are a few of my personal reasons:

1. Paint is a conductor, therefore painting an outlet can cause a fire, very easily just based off of a spark! Better have renters and/or homeowner's insurance if you are going to paint over them!
2. If you ever have an electrical problem and need to replace the outlet for whatever reason, or check the wiring, you will have to ruin your paint job when you try to get the cover off the wall...
3. Just like the outlets in my condo, layers upon layers build up causing the outlet to become blocked, making it impossible to actually use the outlet. What's the point in even having an outlet if you can't use it? You would be better off taking it out and patching the hole!
4. It looks like Crap - honestly, it does! The beauty of the cover plates is that you can hide the hole and the paint job behind them... it gives it such a cleaner look...

Here are a few pictures of the outlets, we were working with:

Exhibit A: This outlet, while it is white and the walls are painted purple, has in fact been painted over numerous times... Can you tell?

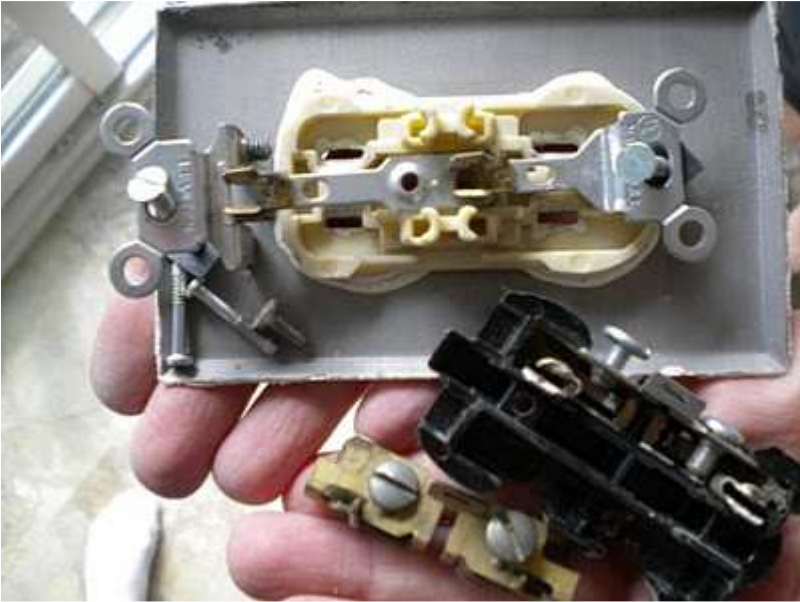


In order to get the outlets and the outlet covers off the wall and to replace them, we literally had to cut them off and chip away at the paint. Even with the screw, that holds the outlet cover to the wall, removed the cover plate which should normally fall off the wall is still attached... My mom even ended up bending an old metal one...



Can you see the painted caked on? Pretty Crazy!

Here is an outlet that we pried off the wall and that literally fell apart. When we got the outlet over off, part of the outlet came with it because it was painted together... yet another example of why not to paint your electrical outlets!!!



Lesson of the Day: DO NOT paint electrical outlets! It takes two seconds to unscrew an electrical cover and it could literally save your life! Why not do the job the right way, the first time!?

The following was added by your Home Inspector, Eric Van De Ven.

Additional reasons not to paint the receptacles is that paint may enter the receptacles and cause improper current transfer, improper grounding, or shock. It also happens to be a violation of the National Electric Code (NEC), cited below.

From the National Electric Code (NEC):

110.12 Mechanical Execution of Work.

Electrical equipment shall be installed in a neat and workmanlike manner.

(A) Unused Openings. Unused cable or raceway openings in boxes, raceways, auxiliary gutters, cabinets, cutout boxes, meter socket enclosures, equipment cases, or housings shall be effectively closed to afford protection substantially equivalent to the wall of the equipment. Where metallic plugs or plates are used with nonmetallic enclosures, they shall be recessed at least 6 mm (¼ in.) from the outer surface of the enclosure.

(B) Subsurface Enclosures. Conductors shall be racked to provide ready and safe access in underground and subsurface enclosures into which persons enter for installation and maintenance.

(C) Integrity of Electrical Equipment and Connections. **Internal parts of electrical equipment**, including busbars, wiring terminals, insulators, and other surfaces, shall not be damaged or contaminated by foreign materials such as paint, plaster, cleaners, abrasives, or corrosive residues. There shall be no damaged parts that may adversely affect safe operation or mechanical strength of the equipment such as parts that are broken; bent; cut; or deteriorated by corrosion, chemical action, or overheating.