

Quick, easy home repair

By GRAHAM BLACKBURN

It's Saturday night and all of your guests have arrived expecting the party of a lifetime. Conversation and champagne are flowing easily. Your party seems destined to be a rave when suddenly, disaster strikes—all of the power in the house goes out. You can see out your window that the neighboring houses all have power. What should you do?

Although some homeowners are intimidated by the thought of fixing problems in the home, not much skill is actually needed and it can be quite cost effective.

A blackout like the one described above is a typical household emergency and no matter how well you prepare there will always be an unexpected disaster which will strike when you least expect it.

If an electrical circuit becomes overloaded for any reason, the power will be shut off to that circuit at the service box. This is accomplished either by a circuit breaker or a fuse. Before attempting to get the power back on (by resetting the circuit breaker or replacing the fuse), take some of the load off the circuit concerned by unplugging or switching off appliances or lights.

Now proceed to the service box. If it is equipped with circuit breakers, all you have to do is to look for the one that is in the "off" or "tripped" position and switch it back to the "on" position.

All of the various switches should be properly labeled so that you can identify which circuit is which—this helps when you want to turn off the power in a particular area. If the switches are not marked, you can identify them by a process of elimination.

Turn everything on and note which switch controls which lights and appliances, etc. A word of warning: Just because you find the breaker that controls the light in any particular room, that does not necessarily mean that neighboring outlets are "dead"—they may well be on a different circuit.

If your service box has fuses, they will probably be one of the various kinds shown in the illustration.

The plug fuse consists of a visible metal strip inside a glass screw-in unit. When the metal strip is broken or the glass has become blackened, the fuse is broken. It should be replaced by one of the same amperage.

The dual element fuse has a spring-loaded metal strip that permits temporary overloading, such as occurs when an electric motor starts up. Otherwise it looks just like a plug fuse.

A third type is the cartridge fuse. Big or small, the only way to know whether this type is blown or still working is to replace it with a known good fuse.

When something electrical stops working, the first job is to identify the blown fuse in the fuse box. If the lights should go out in the bedroom, for example, it is easy to fix if the fuses are properly labeled.

Having first turned off other items on that circuit, shut off the main power, making sure that you are not standing on a wet floor and that you have a flashlight handy.

Then unscrew or remove the fuse in question and replace it with a new fuse of the same amperage, and turn everything back on again. It is a good idea to maintain a supply of the fuses that your box contains so that you always have one handy.

The most common reason for a blown fuse is overloading—too much electricity being used at the same time. If a fuse blows immediately after having been replaced, but with fewer items operating, there may be damage somewhere in the circuit, such as a short in a loose plug or a frayed wire. At this point, unless you are a qualified electrician, call in professional help.

If you prefer the idea of circuit breakers, but your house is equipped with plug fuses, you can replace them with "button breakers" which look just like screw-in plug fuses with a button sticking out of the center. When this kind of breaker trips, the button pops out, and all you need to do is to push it back in to reset the fuse and reactivate the circuit.

Maintaining and repairing your own home can be cost effective. Before calling for outside help, look the situation over yourself instead of immediately declaring, "The water's out—call the plumber." You will be surprised at what you can fix yourself, often faster and cheaper with a little patience and some understanding of the problem.

Editor's Note: Graham Blackburn is a professional furniture maker and is the author of Quick And Easy Home Repair, (Ballantine Books), as well as numerous other books about carpentry and home repair.

Some pointers on selecting tools for home improvement projects

This fall, more and more men and women will be tackling a wide range of home improvement projects, from simple repairs to major renovations. Many will waste considerable time and energy by not using proper tools.

As the do-it-yourself wave continues to grow and more tools appear on the market, the search for the "right" tools can become even more difficult. For this reason, the experts at Stanley Tools have developed the following suggestions and tips that can be used when searching for such commonly used tools as extendable tape rules, levels, crosscut saws and hammers.

"Measure twice, but cut once" is a favorite phrase of many seasoned carpenters who know the importance of having a quality extendable tape rule in their tool collections. No serious do-it-yourselfer should be without one, either.

Quality extendable tape rules should include a thumb-controlled blade-locking device that locks the tape firmly in place, a "true-zero" tape hook, highly visible "life guard" yellow tape, a slowly retracting tape, a durable belt clip, and a chrome-plated case for rust-protection in outdoor applications. Practical extendable tape rules, such as Stanley's popular Powerlock II® tape rule, are compact, lightweight and can be used to measure lengths from 1/4 of an inch up to 30 feet.

Tape rules are available with measuring capabilities over 30 feet for use in measuring property lines, gutters and sports fields. The experts say quality "long tapes" should be easy to hold, uti-



TO MAKE ALL CUTTING JOBS EASIER, select a crosscut saw with an aggressive tooth design, like Stanley Tools' new Short Cut® Tool Box Saw, which cuts up to 30 percent faster than conventional saws. The unique cutting tool also has a handle with built-in 45° and 90° mitre and square angles for convenient marking.

lize a rust-proofed steel tape; and should have a handy fold-out handle for effortless tape winding.

A variety of projects also call for the use of a dependable all-purpose level.

Levels can help guide the installation of many materials from posts and poles, bricks and blocks to shelves, doors, decks

and even wallpaper.

When selecting a level, choose one made from non-warping lightweight metal. A practical level also should utilize 360° liquid-filled vials that are readable from any angle and can be replaced easily if one should ever break. Most professional levels utilize three vials

(filled with an alcohol mixture) so the two outside vials can be set in either the horizontal or vertical direction, depending on the project's requirements.

Because the majority of wood cutting projects involve cutting against the wood's grain, the experts suggest purchasing a quality crosscut saw. To make all cutting jobs easier, select a crosscut saw with an aggressive tooth design to make the saw cut faster and more efficiently.

To handle a majority of applications efficiently, the saw should utilize an optimum number of eight teeth (points) per inch. Crosscut saws with more than eight teeth per inch deliver a fine and slow cut, and those with less than eight tend to give a rough and fast cut.

When choosing an all-purpose hammer, one of the most important things to consider is the weight of the hammer head. A hammer head that is too light makes the work harder than it has to be, and one that is too heavy will be difficult to control. An all-purpose hammer, say the experts, should have a hammer head that weighs around 16 ounces.

A dependable hammer head should be made from high-carbon steel and have a heat-treated face for strength and durability. The face also should be convex, to increase nail driving efficiency.

Hammers with "curved" claws make better all-purpose hammers than those with "rip" claws. Curved claws with sharp double-beveled edges make the nail-pulling process easy.

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