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How Old is the Wiring in Your Home?

Many of us know that the wiring in our homes can be quite old, but how old exactly is it? While the age of the wiring doesn't always mean it's unsafe, it's important to understand what type of wiring is in your home. Some electricians might claim that old wiring needs replacing, and house surveys often suggest rewiring due to its age. Below, I've outlined some common types of older wiring and their approximate installation dates. If you're unsure about the safety of your home's electrics, always call a registered electrician to inspect it.

1. Paper Insulated Wiring (Around 1910)

This type of wiring was commonly used around 1910, especially during the First World War. It was one of the first mass-produced wiring systems and features an outer sheath made of oil and paper. Today, this type of wiring is very rare. If you find it, avoid contact—it can be toxic.

2. Lead Sheathed Wiring (1930s)

Lead sheathed cables were commonly installed in the 1930s, primarily for socket circuits. They have a flat lead sheath with rubber-insulated cores. It's uncommon to find this type of wiring still in use, but it may be present in older homes, such as those listed as Grade II buildings, often hidden under floorboards or in walls.



3. Vulcanized Indian Rubber (VIR/VRI) (1950s)

VIR wiring, which has a rubber-insulated core and waxy cotton sheath, was used mainly in the 1950s. These cables were typically installed as single wires and often resemble shoelaces. While some may still be in use today, they should be replaced to ensure safety.

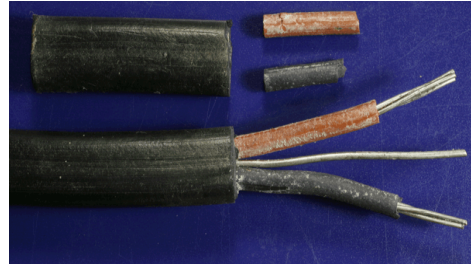


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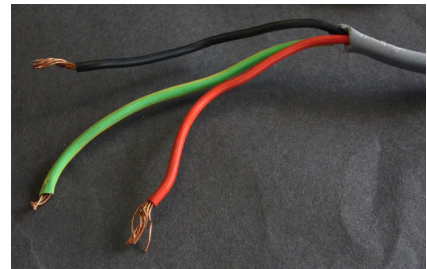
4. Rubber Insulated Wiring (1960s)

This type of wiring was one of the first to include a CPC (Circuit Protective Conductor or earth) between the live and neutral wires. While flexible, the insulation can become brittle over time, exposing live conductors and creating the risk of electric shock. It's vital to replace this wiring to avoid accidents or tripping issues.



5. Grey PVC Insulation (1970s)

Still common in many homes, this wiring often has stranded cores and could be in use in your property. Old lighting cables of this kind can often be found without the CPC in between the live and neutral. These look like they're steel or aluminium conductors when in fact they're tinned copper. The tinning was to prevent corrosion.



If you notice a green, gooey substance leaking from your sockets or switches, it could be a sign that you have this type of wiring. This "green goo" is an irritant, so avoid touching it. Have your wiring tested, as in some cases, a full rewire might be necessary.

6. White/Grey PVC Insulation (1980s)

This type of cable is similar to the wiring we use today, but with solid cores instead of stranded ones. It was usually colour-coded with red for live and black for neutral, whereas modern cables use brown and blue. You might still find this type of cable in use today, but it could be Low Smoke and Fume (LSF) cable, designed to produce less smoke in case of fire.

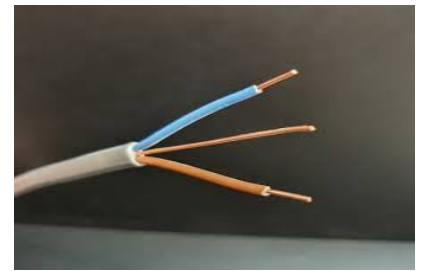


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7. Grey PVC Insulation with Harmonized Colours (2004 onwards)

From 2004 onwards, wiring has been produced with harmonized European colours—brown for live and blue for neutral. While some may miss the more obvious red used in older wiring, the new colour scheme is intended for standardization across Europe.



What Should You Do If Your Wiring Is Older?

If your home has any of the older types of wiring as shown above (1-6), it's important to have it checked by a qualified electrician. Even though older wiring doesn't always pose a direct danger, some types, such as rubber-insulated or paper-wrapped cables, may need replacing.

If you're in doubt about the condition of your electrics, getting a professional inspection is always a good idea to ensure the safety of your home. If you have any concerns or need advice, don't hesitate to contact a registered electrician