



Are Your Down-Lights Safe?

What is a downlight?

Downlights (recessed luminaries) are light fixtures installed in hollow openings, usually in ceilings. By installing them in these hollow recesses the light looks as if it is part of the ceiling, rather than hanging down or sitting separate from the ceiling.

Types of downlights

Downlights operate at mains voltage (230 Volts) or are powered via a transformer at extra-low voltage (12 Volts). Extra-low voltage (ELV) downlighters are often described as "low voltage" on product packaging. Downlights may also be described as 'Fire rated'. This means they have in-built fire protection that completely seals the downlighter in the event of fire in the room below, to prevent the spread of fire and smoke into other areas.

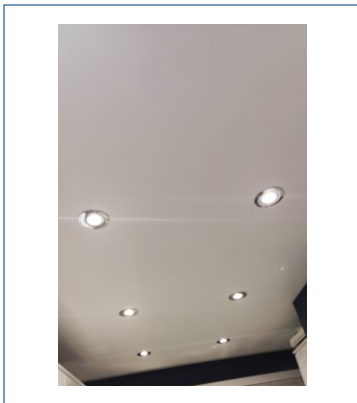
Are your down-lights safe? They can be a dangerous matter

In modern buildings, standards are in place to delay the spread of flames in the event of a fire. One particular standard applies to the ceiling of a building. The ceiling is considered one of the most important fire barriers, slowing the spread of the fire from floor to floor. When installing down-lights care must be taken to ensure the fire rating is maintained

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Older and poorly installed down-lighters are the cause of significant damage to a number of homes each year, not necessarily because the fitting caused the fire, but because the poorly installed fitting allowed the spread of the fire. If they were installed before 2005, there's a significant chance your down-lighters aren't compliant and therefore aren't safe.

When older and poorly fitted down-lighters were installed into a ceiling they would have created a hole in the plasterboard, this provides an edge and a weakness for a fire to take hold quicker and enables flames to pass into the roof void and spread further throughout your home.

The difference between down-lighters installed today and down-lighters installed before 2005? Safety. Most down-lights purchased today have built in fire protection, be careful though many large DIY stores still sell non fire rated fittings, these fittings would then require a Fire/smoke hood to be fitted in order to make it compliant.

The Building Regulations state that any residential building with a top floor height of up to 18m above the ground should have ceilings that are resistant to fire for up to 60 minutes, while residential buildings that have a top floor up to 30m should have ceilings resistant to fire for up to 90 minutes. Because of these regulations, down-lighters installed today must be rated appropriately for the ceiling they are fitted to.

Fire rated down-lighters contain a material that expands when it reaches a certain temperature and seals off the hole to slow down the spread, giving people more time to escape the building. Most off the shelf fire rated down-lighters give you 90 minutes protection in the event of a fire.

So, are your down-lighters safe? If you're still in doubt, contact a qualified electrician for advice?