

Be prepared

Surge Protection for Your Home

A **surge protector** guards computers, stereo components, home security systems and appliances such as microwave ovens against power surges.

What's a Power Surge?

A surge is a sudden unexpected jump in voltage. Power surges occur for various reasons. The most common is a sudden increase in voltage when large appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners restart after a power outage.

A more familiar source is lightning, although it's actually one of the least common. (By the way, a lightning strike will overpower almost any surge protector. In a lightning storm, unplug your home's electronics.)

Why Should You Care?

Power surges always have occurred. But we didn't need surge protectors years ago. Today many components in electronic devices are far more delicate than old components were. Even if it lasts only a fraction of a second, a surge can overload vulnerable new electronics and wreak tremendous damage.

What Type of Surge Defense Do You Need?

Surge protectors are available that offer four to six outlets in a protection center, or "strip." That makes it easy to protect not only your computer but the printer, fax, external modem and scanner with one strip. A surge protector also is a good idea for your home entertainment center-TV, DVD player, stereo-and for small appliances.

Expect to pay \$30 to \$50 for a good surge-control center. Before you buy a protector make sure it's rated by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Look for a strip with an indicator light that tells you if the protection components are functioning.

A far better surge protector can be installed in your house's electrical panel to protect the home's entire electrical system. Whole-house protectors, which are placed directly behind the electrical meter, must be put in by your cooperative. Costs vary.

There's no device that will protect against all power surges, especially those caused by lightning.

But a two-stage system-strip combined with a panel-box surge protector-provides the highest level of protection available.