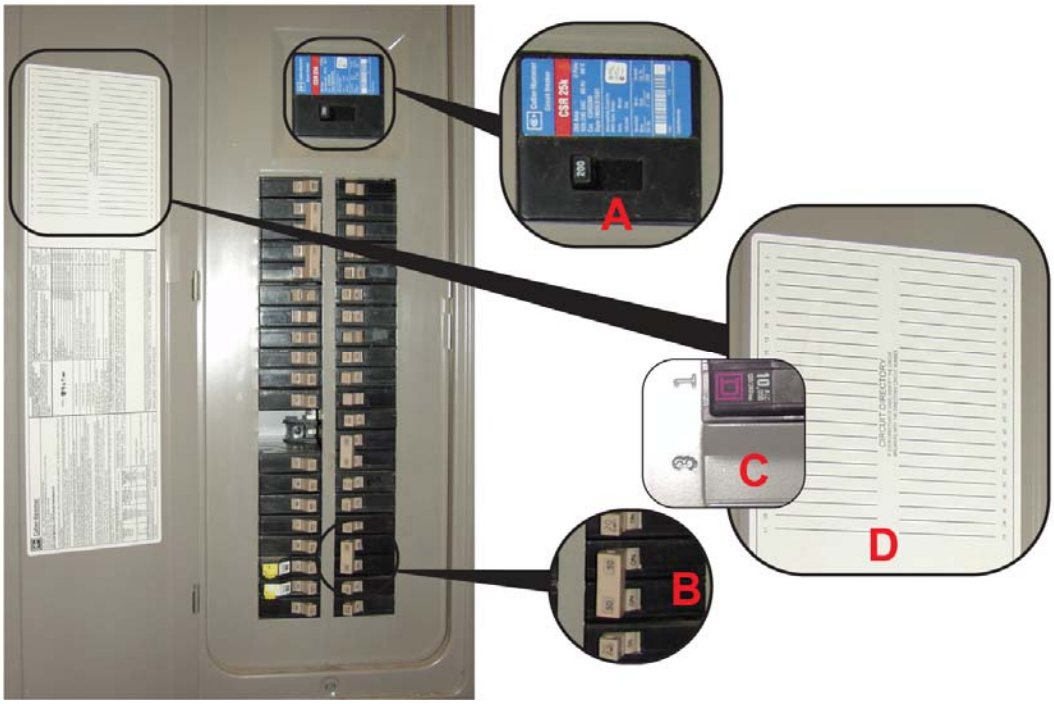
Labeling Your Electrical Panel

Level of Difficulty - 3

If you have an electrical panel that has unlabeled circuits, it's a good idea to mark them so that they can be found quickly when needed. This is a very simple job to do and careful mapping will pay off for you down the road. You will be turning off all of the power to the house, so do this project during the daytime.

Minimally, electrical panels should be marked, by matching circuit breakers to the area of your house that is supplied through that breaker. If you want to put in a little extra effort now to save time later, you can mark the back side of the cover of each light switch and electrical outlet with the breaker number that controls it. Then if you need to change a switch, an outlet, or a light fixture, you will know exactly which breaker to turn off so that you can do the work safely.



1. Go through your home and turn on all of your lights. This should include ceiling lights, lamps, stove lights, night lights, etc.
2. Now, move to your electrical panel. If you are working with a partner, the partner should be in the living area. You can communicate with each other by cell phone, walkie talkie, or you can yell at the top of your voice!
3. At the electrical panel, turn off all of the breakers, except for the main breaker, if you have one. The main breaker turns off power to the rest of the electrical panel and should be marked as "Main" or as the total capacity of your electrical panel "100" or "200," etc. *(illustration A)*
4. Each breaker is marked in amps. Breakers marked 30, 40 or 50 amp are most often used by appliances that require more power to run. *(illustration B)* Turn these breakers on one at a time, then record which appliance can now be turned on. (Stove tops, ovens, air conditioners, hot tub heaters, electric water heaters, electric furnaces, central vacuums, etc. all require a large amperage breaker.)
5. Next move to 15 and 20 amp breakers. The electrical panel is marked by a number next to each breaker *(illustration C)* or can be marked by a number on the map that corresponds to the breaker panel *(illustration D)*. Turn on the first 15 or 20 amp breaker, noting the number on the panel next to it. Move to the living area and look for lights that are turned on. Where you see lights on, check nearby electrical outlets with a radio or nightlight, then mark this/these rooms on your electrical map.
6. It is likely that you will have some breakers that will not turn on lights. These breakers are probably dedicated to something that draws more power, such as a dishwasher, garbage disposal, power saw, etc. If you still have not identified where the power is going, check all corners of your house, including the attic, basement, garage, outdor lighting and outlets. Look for objects with motors, pumps or a heating element.