OLD AND NEW CABLE COLOURS

OLD BLACK, NEW BLACK. WHICH ONE IS LIVE?

The UK **harmonised** its colours with the rest of Europe (not because of Brexit). New colours could be used from **1 April 2004**, and from **1 April 2006** only new-colour cable should be installed.

FUNCTION	OLD (PRE-2004)	NEW (HARMONISED)
Line 1 / single-phase line	Red	Brown
Line 2	Yellow	Black
Line 3	Blue	Grey
Neutral	Black	Blue
Protective conductor	Green/yellow (unchanged)	

Why it matters on three-phase Old **black was neutral**, but new **black is a line (L2)**. Old **blue was L3**, but new **blue is neutral**. Mixing them up on an alteration can put a line in a neutral terminal, which is wrong polarity, or swap two lines, so a three-phase motor runs backwards and can be damaged. Always check what each conductor actually is before connecting.

Where old and new colours meet in one installation, a **caution label** has traditionally been fitted at the consumer unit: *"This installation has wiring colours to two versions of BS 7671…"*. That requirement (Reg 514.14) was **deleted in A2:2022**, so the notice is no longer required by BS 7671 — though nothing stops you fitting one, especially on additions and alterations.

Colour-blind electricians aren't excluded. Apps can identify cable colours. Some rail and aviation roles do require a colour test.

Electrician's Guide to the Building Regs · Chapter 11 · old and new conductor colours table · **p.191**

On-Site Guide · Appendix K · identification of conductors (old and new)

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