



What Is a Consumer Unit?

If you've been advised that your consumer unit may need upgrading, or you're not sure what you currently have - this guide explains what it is, what it does, and why it matters.

A consumer unit (often referred to as a fuse board) is the main control point of your electrical installation. It distributes electricity around your property and helps keep your circuits, your property, and the people using them safe.

What Does a Consumer Unit Do?

In simple terms, a consumer unit does three key things:

- Distributes power to different parts of your property
- Protects each circuit from overload and faults
- Disconnects the supply quickly if something goes wrong

Modern consumer units are designed not just to supply electricity, but to automatically switch off power when a fault is detected, reducing the risk of electric shock and fire.

Who Can Install or Replace a Consumer Unit?

Consumer unit work is not considered a minor electrical task and must be carried out in accordance with current regulations.

In most cases, this type of work must be:

- Installed by a qualified electrician
- Fully tested on completion
- Certified with an Electrical Installation Certificate
- Notified under Building Regulations (Part P) where required

This ensures the installation is safe, compliant, and properly recorded. This is not considered DIY work and should only be carried out by a competent and qualified electrician.

RCD Protection - Why It Matters

The most important safety feature in a modern consumer unit is RCD protection.

An RCD (Residual Current Device) monitors the flow of electricity and disconnects the supply almost instantly if it detects a fault - such as electricity flowing where it shouldn't.

This is critical because:

- It helps prevent serious electric shock
- It reduces the risk of electrical fires
- It provides protection that older fuse boards simply do not offer

If you'd like a bit more detail, you can read our [guide on RCD protection](#).

If your installation does not have RCD protection, it is considered to be below modern safety standards.

Types of Consumer Unit

Consumer units have changed significantly over time. The level of protection they provide depends on their age and design.

Older Fuse Boards (Outdated)

Typically include:

- Rewireable fuses (fuse wire)
- No RCD protection
- Limited fault protection
- These installations do not meet modern safety expectations and are commonly recommended for upgrade.



Early Modern Consumer Units

Typically include:

- One or two RCDs protecting multiple circuits
- Shared protection across several circuits



- Generally of plastic construction

These are safer than older fuse boards but do not provide the same level of protection as modern installations.

Modern Consumer Units (Current Standard)

Typically include:

- RCBO protection on every circuit
- Metal enclosures for improved fire safety
- Optional surge protection



This is the current standard for new installations and upgrades.

How to Tell If Your Consumer Unit Is Outdated

You may have an older or outdated installation if:

- You have a fuse board with fuse wire
- There is no RCD protection present
- Your board looks older or has a plastic enclosure
- Circuits are not clearly labelled
- The board is full or has no spare capacity
- You experience frequent tripping or no tripping at all

This is something that would typically be confirmed during a **professional inspection**. If you're unsure, it's always worth having it checked by a qualified electrician.

When Should a Consumer Unit Be Upgraded?

An upgrade is typically recommended when:

- RCD protection is not present
- The existing board is outdated or damaged
- The installation no longer meets current standards
- Additional circuits or future upgrades are being considered
- An inspection (EICR) identifies improvement items

A consumer unit upgrade improves the level of protection, but it does not fix faults within existing wiring. These would be identified separately.

In some cases, additional work may be required before a consumer unit can be safely replaced, such as the installation of a contractor's isolator switch or checks to the main incoming supply.

In many cases, an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) is used to assess the overall condition of an installation and identify whether a consumer unit upgrade is recommended.

A Balanced Approach

Not every installation requires immediate replacement, and not every older board is unsafe.

However, where modern protection is not present, particularly RCD protection, an upgrade is often recommended to bring the installation more in line with current safety expectations.

In Summary

Your consumer unit is the central point of your electrical system - and one of the most important safety components in your home.

The key question is:

Does your installation have modern protection, including RCD protection?

If not, it may be worth considering an upgrade.

If you're unsure what type of consumer unit you have, feel free to get in touch or send a photo of your existing fuse board, we'll be happy to advise.

Get in Touch.