Smiley Electric

Licensed electrician · Portland, Oregon · Oregon CCB #227116

FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Bathroom outlet not working? Start with the GFCI

The answer, first

A dead bathroom outlet is almost always a tripped GFCI. Press the Reset button on the bathroom outlet itself first. If that does nothing, the outlet controlling it is somewhere else, because one GFCI often protects several outlets downstream, and the tripped one might be in another bathroom, the garage, or the panel.

Bathrooms are required to have GFCI protection, the outlet with the little Test and Reset buttons, because they are full of water and hair dryers. When it senses even a tiny current leak it shuts off instantly, which is exactly what saves you from a shock. So a dead bathroom outlet is usually the safety device doing its job, not a broken outlet.

The reset walk-through

Go through these in order before you assume anything is broken. Most dead bathroom outlets come back on somewhere in the first three steps.

- [ ] Look at the dead outlet for Test and Reset buttons; if it has them, press Reset firmly until it clicks and holds
- [ ] No buttons on that outlet? A GFCI elsewhere is feeding it. Press Reset on the GFCI in your other bathrooms, the garage, the laundry area, and any outdoor outlet
- [ ] Still dead? Check the breaker panel for a breaker that is tripped or sitting halfway, and flip it fully OFF then back ON
- [ ] Test the outlet with a lamp or phone charger you know works, to rule out a dead device
- [ ] Unplug a high-draw item like a hair dryer or space heater that may have caused the trip, then reset again

If the GFCI won't reset or won't stay reset

A GFCI that clicks but pops right back out, or will not click at all, is telling you the fault is still there or the device has worn out. GFCIs age, especially in a damp Portland bathroom, and after 10 to 15 years they get oversensitive or fail. It can also be moisture in the outlet, a downstream wiring problem, or a faulty appliance still plugged in somewhere on the circuit. For the full picture on why a GFCI keeps shutting off, see why a GFCI keeps tripping.

When to call an electrician

A dead outlet that will not come back after resetting GFCIs and the breaker points to a loose connection, a wiring fault, or a failed device, and that is where a professional comes in. Call a licensed electrician if any of these apply. We diagnose the dead outlet, restore power safely, and verify the rest of the bathroom circuit is sound as part of routine electrical repair.

- [ ] The GFCI will not reset, or trips again immediately
- [ ] The outlet is warm, discolored, or smells burnt
- [ ] You see sparks or hear buzzing at the outlet
- [ ] Multiple outlets went dead at once
- [ ] The home is older and may not have proper GFCI protection at all

A note on bathroom wiring rules

If your bathroom outlets are old two-prong receptacles, or share a circuit with the lights and keep overloading, the wiring may predate current code. Bathrooms are supposed to have GFCI protection and a dedicated 20-amp circuit for the outlets. Our guide on bathroom and bathtub electrical safety covers what the code actually requires and what a remodel often uncovers.

Frequently asked questions

Why is my bathroom outlet dead but the lights still work?

The lights and the outlets are usually on separate circuits, so a tripped GFCI kills the outlets while the lights stay on. Press Reset on the bathroom outlet if it has Test and Reset buttons. If it has none, a GFCI in another bathroom, the garage, or the panel is feeding it, so reset those. One GFCI commonly protects several outlets downstream.

Where is the reset button for my bathroom outlet?

It is on the GFCI outlet that protects the circuit, which is not always the dead outlet itself. Check your other bathrooms first, then the garage, laundry area, and any outdoor outlet, since one GFCI often covers several. If none reset it, check the breaker panel for a tripped breaker and flip it fully off then on.

Why won't my bathroom GFCI reset?

A GFCI that will not hold a reset is either still sensing a fault or has worn out, which is common after 10 to 15 years in a damp bathroom. Moisture in the outlet, a downstream wiring problem, or a faulty appliance on the circuit can also keep it tripping. If it will not stay reset, have a licensed electrician diagnose it.

Is a dead bathroom outlet dangerous?

Usually it is just a tripped GFCI protecting you, which is not dangerous on its own. It becomes a concern if the outlet is warm, discolored, or smells burnt, if you see sparks, or if it will not reset. Those signs point to a wiring fault, and you should turn off the circuit and call a licensed electrician.

Sources

1. Why is My Power Out?, Portland General Electric. https://portlandgeneral.com/outages-safety/why-is-my-power-out
2. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters, Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). https://www.esfi.org/program/ground-fault-circuit-interrupters/

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/bathroom-outlet-not-working/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.
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