Remote Control Encyclopedia Article

Remote Control

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Remote Control

Remote control was first developed for military use. The concept was used by the German Navy during World War I. A remote apparatus, operated from a distance, was used to steer radio-controlled motorboats that sabotaged enemy ships. By World War II, military forces had developed radio-controlled bombs and other weapons operated by remote apparatus.

One of the first post-war uses for the remote control was as an automatic garage door opener, a concept developed by American manufacturers in the 1940s. Remote control for the television was first introduced in the mid-1950s and today is considered standard equipment with any television set. Most stereo systems today feature a remote control apparatus as well.

The television remote control operates by way of a beam of infrared rays, which are sent from the control apparatus to the television set. A device called a photodetector converts the rays to an electronic signal. The signal is sent to a remote control unit, which controls the various functions of the television set. This is known as infrared remote control.

Like the first television sets, the first remote controls were very basic. Some changed channels only and could not control volume. Also, many remote controls only allowed to change channel by moving up or down, not by punching in the precise channel numbers. Today, television remote control systems are as complex as the televisions they operate, and can be used to perform all the various functions that today's televisions offer.

Remote control is used in many other realms also. Radio remote control continues to be used today and outside of military uses are used to steer model airplanes and other toys, as well as position antennas and satellites. In the military realm, remote control works in conjunction with the computer to steer guided missiles and other objects of destruction. Ultrasonic remote control operates telephone answering machines and also some television sets, among other devices. In such devises, a microphone converts the sound waves into electronic signals that flip electronic switches which, in turn, control operation of the device. Electrical remote control can be used over a telephone line to transfer money in a bank account and conduct other similar transactions. Mechanical remote control allows for the operation of a machine from a remote point. Such a concept was applied at Three Mile Island, where robots performed much of the cleanup after the nuclear disaster there.