

Relay Outputs – Transient Suppression for Inductive Loads in a Control System

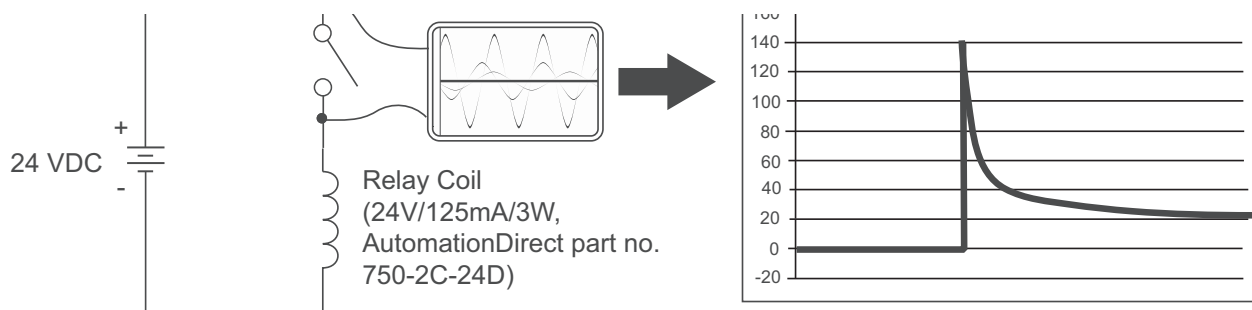
The following pages are intended to give a quick overview of the negative effects of transient voltages on a control system and provide some simple advice on how to effectively minimize them. The need for transient suppression is often not apparent to the newcomers in the automation world. Many mysterious errors that can afflict an installation can be traced back to a lack of transient suppression.

What is a Transient Voltage and Why is it Bad?

Inductive loads (devices with a coil) generate transient voltages as they transition from being energized to being de-energized. If not suppressed, the transient can be many times greater than the voltage applied to the coil. These transient voltages can damage PLC outputs or other electronic devices connected to the circuit, and cause unreliable operation of other electronics in the general area. Transients must be managed with suppressors for long component life and reliable operation of the control system.

This example shows a simple circuit with a small 24 V/125 mA/3 W relay. As you can see, when the switch is opened, thereby de-energizing the coil, the transient voltage generated across the switch contacts peaks at 140 V.

Example: Circuit with no Suppression



Chapter 2: Installation, Wiring, and Specifications

In the same circuit on the previous page, replacing the relay with a larger 24 V/290 mA/7 W relay will generate a transient voltage exceeding 800 V (not shown). Transient voltages like this can cause many problems, including:

- Relay contacts driving the coil may experience arcing, which can pit the contacts and reduce the relay's lifespan.
- Solid state (transistor) outputs driving the coil can be damaged if the transient voltage exceeds the transistor's ratings. In extreme cases, complete failure of the output can occur the very first time a coil is de-energized.
- Input circuits, which might be connected to monitor the coil or the output driver, can also be damaged by the transient voltage.

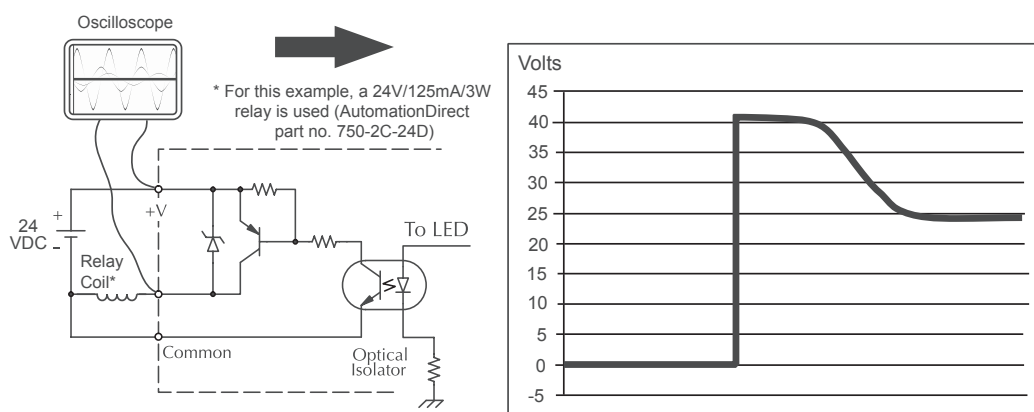
A very destructive side-effect of the arcing across relay contacts is the electromagnetic interference (EMI) it can cause. This occurs because the arcing causes a current surge, which releases RF energy. The entire length of wire between the relay contacts, the coil, and the power source carries the current surge and becomes an antenna that radiates the RF energy. It will readily couple into parallel wiring and may disrupt the PLC and other electronics in the area. This EMI can make an otherwise stable control system behave unpredictably at times.

PLC's Integrated Transient Suppressors

Although the PLC's outputs typically have integrated suppressors to protect against transients, they are not capable of handling them all. It is usually necessary to have some additional transient suppression for an inductive load.

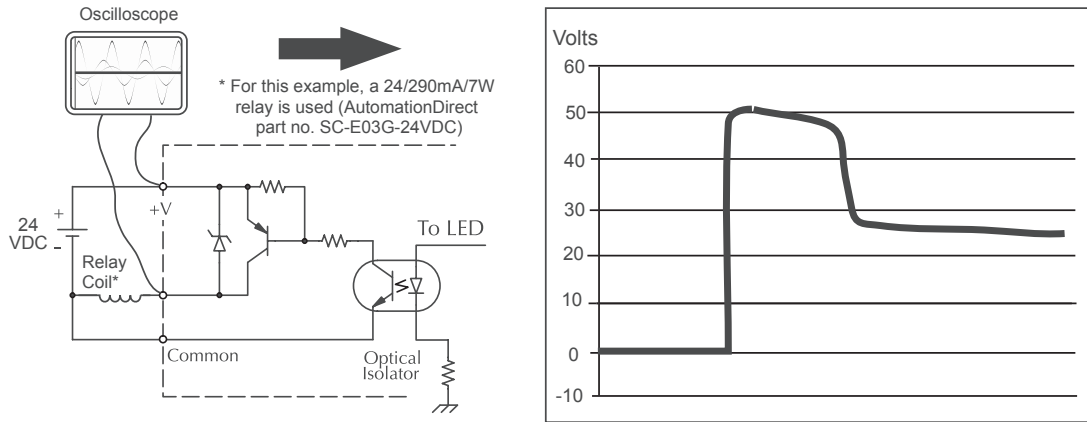
Here is another example using the same 24 V/125 mA/3 W relay used earlier. This example measures the PNP transistor output of a D0-06DD2 PLC, which incorporates an integrated Zener diode for transient suppression. Instead of the 140V peak in the first example, the transient voltage here is limited to about 40 V by the Zener diode. While the PLC will probably tolerate repeated transients in this range for some time, the 40 V is still beyond the module's peak output voltage rating of 30 V.

Example: Small Inductive Load with Only Integrated Suppression



The next example uses the same circuit as above, but with a larger 24 V/290 mA/7 W relay, thereby creating a larger inductive load. As you can see, the transient voltage generated is much worse, peaking at over 50 V. Driving an inductive load of this size without additional transient suppression is very likely to permanently damage the PLC output.

Example: Larger Inductive Load with Only Integrated Suppression

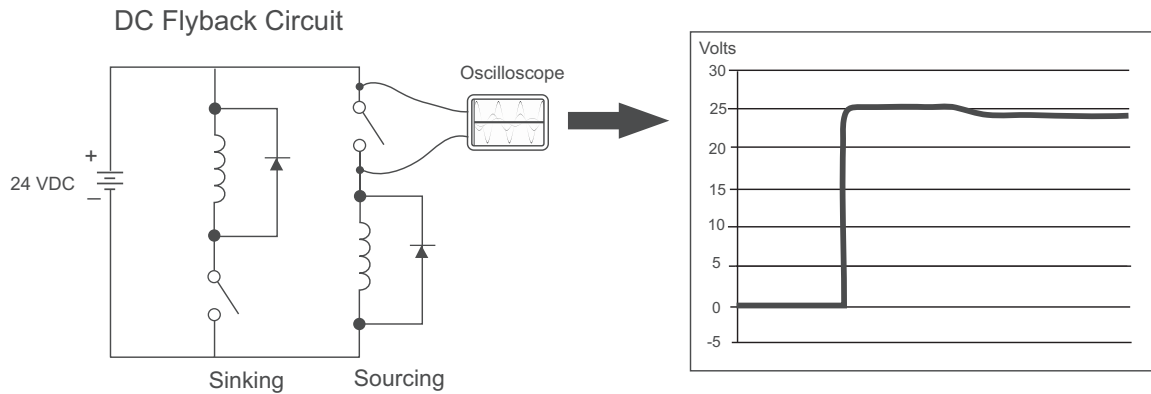


Additional transient suppression should be used in both these examples. If you are unable to measure the transients generated by the connected loads of your control system, using additional transient suppression on all inductive loads would be the safest practice.

Types of Additional Transient Protection

DC Coils:

The most effective protection against transients from a DC coil is a flyback diode. A flyback diode can reduce the transient to roughly 1V over the supply voltage, as shown in this example.



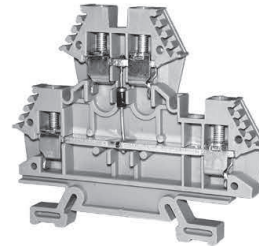
Many AutomationDirect socketed relays and motor starters have add-on flyback diodes that plug or screw into the base, such as the AD-ASMD-250 protection diode module and 784-4C-SKT-1 socket module shown below. If an add-on flyback diode is not available for your inductive load, an easy way to add one is to use AutomationDirect's DN-D10DR-A diode terminal block, a 600 VDC power diode mounted in a slim DIN rail housing.



AD-ASMD-250
Protection Diode Module



784-4C-SKT-1
Relay Socket



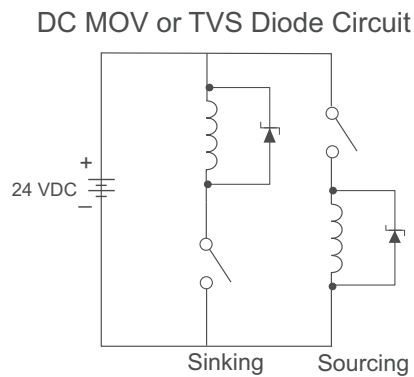
DN-D10DR-A
Diode Terminal Block

Two more common options for DC coils are Metal Oxide Varistors (MOV) or TVS diodes. These devices should be connected across the driver (PLC output) for best protection as shown below. The optimum voltage rating for the suppressor is the lowest rated voltage available that will NOT conduct at the supply voltage, while allowing a safe margin.

AutomationDirect's ZL-TSD8-24 transorb module is a good choice for 24 VDC circuits. It is a bank of 8 uni-directional 30 V TVS diodes. Since they are uni-directional, be sure to observe the polarity during installation. MOVs or bi-directional TVS diodes would install at the same location, but have no polarity concerns.



ZL-TSD8-24
Transorb Module



AC Coils:

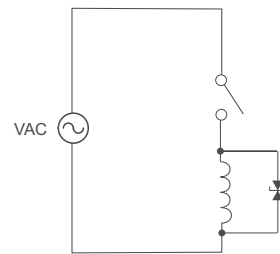
Two options for AC coils are MOVs or bi-directional TVS diodes. These devices are most effective at protecting the driver from a transient voltage when connected across the driver (PLC output) but are also commonly connected across the coil. The optimum voltage rating for the suppressor is the lowest rated voltage available that will NOT conduct at the supply voltage, while allowing a safe margin.

AutomationDirect's ZL-TSD8-120 transorb module is a good choice for 120 VAC circuits. It is a bank of eight bi-directional 180 V TVS diodes.



ZL-TSD8-120
Transorb Module

AC MOV or Bi-Directional Diode Circuit



NOTE: Manufacturers of devices with coils frequently offer MOV or TVS diode suppressors as an add-on option which mount conveniently across the coil. Before using them, carefully check the suppressor's ratings. Just because the suppressor is made specifically for that part does not mean it will reduce the transient voltages to an acceptable level.

For example, a MOV or TVS diode rated for use on 24-48 VDC coils would need to have a high enough voltage rating to NOT conduct at 48 V. That suppressor might typically start conducting at roughly 60 VDC. If it were mounted across a 24 V coil, transients of roughly 84 V (if sinking output) or -60 V (if sourcing output) could reach the PLC output. Many semiconductor PLC outputs cannot tolerate such levels.

Prolonging Relay Contact Life

Relay contacts wear according to the amount of relay switching, amount of spark created at the time of open or closure, and presence of airborne contaminants. There are some steps you can take to help prolong the life of relay contacts, such as switching the relay on or off only when it is necessary, and if possible, switching the load on or off at a time when it will draw the least current. Also, take measures to suppress inductive voltage spikes from inductive DC loads such as contactors and solenoids.

For inductive loads in DC circuits we recommend using a suppression diode as shown in the following diagram (DO NOT use this circuit with an AC power supply). When the load is energized the diode is reverse-biased (high impedance). When the load is turned off, energy stored in its coil is released in the form of a negative-going voltage spike. At this moment the diode is forward-biased (low impedance) and shunts the energy to ground. This protects the relay contacts from the high voltage arc that would occur just as the contacts are opening.

Place the diode as close to the inductive field device as possible. Use a diode with a peak inverse voltage rating (PIV) at least 100 PIV, 3 A forward current or larger. Use a fast-recovery type (such as Schottky type). DO NOT use a small-signal diode such as 1N914, 1N941, etc. Be sure the diode is in the circuit correctly before operation. If installed backwards, it short-circuits the supply when the relay energizes.

