

25 April 2018

Media Release

Defect electrical bigger risk than cladding

Hundreds of thousands of people across NSW are at significant risk from ageing electrical wiring in their homes and not having lifesaving residual current devices (RCDs). The peak body for electricians, the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), is calling on politicians to address the issue as a priority.

While the public and governments around the world have focused on addressing cladding, electrical issues may present a bigger risk.

The tragic fire at Greenfell Tower in London was caused by an electrical fault, and electrical defects were the second most common cause of fire in NSW in 2016; the latest year for which figures are available.

And there's widespread evidence of dangerous electrics in people's homes. Between 2010 and 2013, 2348 kilometres of Infinity cabling was laid in NSW. It was found to be linked to several fires and was subsequently recalled. Since then, 433 properties have been declared safe, however 74 per cent of the dangerous cabling is yet to be remediated in homes.

The issue appears to be getting worse in NSW, which reported a 23.3 per cent rise in accidental residential fires per 100,000 households over the 12-month period 2015-16 compared to 2016-17. This is the biggest rise in any state.

Meanwhile, because of their age many homes still do not have lifesaving RCDs or circuit breakers, which are now mandatory. These devices prevent direct electric shocks and can help to prevent electrical fires by cutting off power.

NECA is calling for the introduction of mandatory electrical safety audits for households in NSW, similar to schemes in place in ACT and those being piloted in Tasmania. This would see electrical inspections carried out before home sales, providing an opportunity to rectify any issues – and save lives.

Suresh Manickam, CEO of NECA, said:

“How many more properties have to be lost and lives put at risk before we have proper electrical safety in homes for people in NSW? Every year we see avoidable tragedies caused by unsafe electricals – whether it's ageing wiring or the absence of much-needed safety devices.

“Mandatory inspections would provide the opportunity for trained professionals to go into homes, and undertake electrical work that may well prevent future fatalities. It would also give buyers peace of mind that their new home meets the highest safety standards.

“We are pleased to see ACT and Tasmania introduce progressive measures and it's time for NSW to follow suit.”

Steve Wright, owner of Steve Wright Electrical based in Strathfield, said:

“Most of the buildings I am servicing would not comply to current standards due to age and type of cabling or just simply the protection methods employed to protect both the building and people in them.

“Cabling that should have been removed many years ago is like holding a lit fuse waiting for a bad day to happen.

“There are no ongoing checks to keep the buildings and people safe Yet, due to lack of awareness or cost pressures, seldom does anyone care. ‘It works so why should I fix it?’ is a common response.

“Sadly, most of these major problems give little warning until it's too late.”

-ENDS-

NECA media contact

Lynda Proude 0458 726 355, lynda.proude@neca.asn.au ski

Notes for editors

- 1. NECA is the peak industry body representing the interests of electrical and communications contractors Australia-wide.*
- 2. Membership comprises over 5,000 contracting companies with over 50,000 employees.*
- 3. NECA wholly-owns Registered Training Organisations and Group Training Organisations in NSW, VIC & WA, the EcoSmart Electricians initiative, ACRS (a national cabling registrar) and has a joint venture with NESS Super in NSW.*
- 4. NECA employs around 2,000 apprentice electricians, training a further 2,000.*