

A word from the CEO

It was good to see the speculation around the Infinity Cables issue coming to a conclusion.

While we at NECA would have preferred to see a total replacement, the ACCC opted to take a risk-based approach in this particular case. When both the manufacturer and distributor have gone out of business it is much harder to find a solution that pleases all parties. As I'm sure you know, the key thing here is that there are only two areas of cable that must be replaced:

1. Any cable laid near a heat source (please check our website for definitions: www.neca.asn.au).
2. Any cable installed in a cavity space (again see the website for definitions).

The process for replacement is also a little unusual in that the contractor who laid the cable must identify where it was laid and identify what actually needs to be replaced, at his own cost. But the repair and reinstallation work will be managed, and paid for, by the distributor. This is because the ACCC determined that as these distributors carry the cost of the repair work, they should be able to manage the process.

In the event that the original installer goes ahead and replaces the potentially faulty cable, he or she would then be obliged to carry that cost. So we don't advise you to go that route.

Unfortunately for any contractor who purchased this cable direct from Infinity he or she is responsible for the repair work and all the associated costs, as Infinity is now in receivership.

This was a particularly complicated situation but there are still lessons to be learned, and we recommend that you do two things:

1. Always buy your products from a well-established and reputable electrical wholesaler; and,
2. Always check that this distributor has Product Recall insurance.

This is probably not the end of the story but we certainly hope that the worst is now over.



PARLIAMENTARY LUNCH SERIES

As part of our advocacy we have set up a Parliamentary Luncheon series. The first lunch was with The Hon. Bruce Billson MP – the Minister for Small Business, the second was with The Hon. Sussan Ley MP – the Assistant Minister for Education, and we have The Hon. Greg Hunt MP – Minister for the Environment joining us in mid-November. We hope that our members who have attended these lunches found them interesting and informative.

RECENT GOVERNMENT SUBMISSIONS

With the Federal Government now in full swing, we have put forward comments and submissions in relation to improving the model *WHS Laws Issues Paper: Regulation Impact Statement* and the *Federal Government's Fair Entitlements Guarantee Amendment Bill 2014*. Both of these submissions seek to address fundamental issues of red tape and inequity that has built up in our workplaces for many years, making business life more complex and difficult to hire staff.

Our feedback to improving the model WHS laws argued for the removal of the requirement for mandatory audiometric testing for each worker, given the failings of the exam procedure and the practical difficulties of proving the source of hearing loss. In addition, NECA also called for the generic declaration of emergency planning procedures across multiple worksites to avoid duplication and promote greater consistency for contractors. NECA also supported the inclusion of a notice requirement for workplace entry of a minimum of 24 hours and a maximum of 14 days into the model WHS legislation to ensure transparency and alignment with the Fair Work Act 2009.

The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's Inquiry into the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Amendment Act has allowed us to encourage the Government to maintain its support for the position of a standard of "16 weeks on redundancy payments" under the Fair Entitlements Guarantee Scheme (FEGS) to align with the maximum cap set by the National Employment Standards (NES) within the Fair Work Act 2009. This creates a greater level of equity and removes any uncertainty about the accepted standards on redundancy payments.

NECA also argued that the proposed legislation should go further to address other points of inequity including the exemption of redundancy payments for businesses with fewer than 15 staff under FEGS in alignment with the NES and the consideration of amendment to the definition of a small business to include an FTE count of 15 employees or less, rather than just 15 physical staff.

ASQA AND SKILLS COUNCILS REFORM

In September, the Minister for Industry, The Hon. Ian MacFarlane MP announced the Federal Government's second tranche of VET reforms with the goal to deliver a more highly skilled workforce and greater

employer satisfaction and involvement with the sector. These reforms include changes to the operations of ASQA, which will seek to provide a greater share of resources towards those training organisations who have failed to consistently deliver high standards and regulatory compliance while allowing those organisations who have delivered for industry to be freed from some regulatory shackles through the invitation of a delegation that would remove the need to seek ASQA permission to make registration changes.

At the end of the current contract period for the present 12 industry skills councils, the Government has committed to moving to a more contestable model for the development and maintenance of training packages. While any of the current 12 councils are allowed to contest, it is clear that changes to the operations of these councils are imminent and that we can look forward to seeing greater industry led development of VET curriculum in the years ahead.

'DAVE' IS BACK...

Our favourite electrical contractor is back with a new video summarising the work NECA does behind the scenes to help members. We don't want to spoil the fun by telling you what Dave is up to this time but we hope you enjoy the new story. You may have heard him on the radio too. NECA ran its first Australia-wide radio campaign this spring and we're interested in your feedback.

The campaign ran in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Launceston, Devonport, Adelaide and Perth. There were three advertisements. One promoting membership, one promoting our advocacy and industry role and one encouraging consumers to use our "Find an Electrician" service. The campaign ends as this issue comes out.

Best regards
Suresh Manickam
NECA CEO

Technical knowledge base (TKB)

A new online and searchable Technical Knowledge Base (TKB) has been developed in WA for NECA members.

In order to provide an easy way for members to access the complex technical information they need, whether onsite or outside of business hours, NECA WA has enhanced their technical telephone service by developing an online TKB.

Can you imagine being able to simultaneously search the Wiring Rules, network operator connections manuals and legislated electrical requirements at the job site using your tablet or smart phone? Within seconds you could find the clause or diagram you need or read helpful FAQ articles related to your query.

Research and collaboration

During the development phase, NECA consulted with Western Power and EnergySafety and gained permission to upload the WAERs, Energy Bulletins, WADCM and commonly used forms. Feedback gathered from various committees, NECA events and general conversation with members has also been incorporated into TKB and continues to influence its new content.

Positive results

The feedback from members has been overwhelmingly positive, with over 400 users requesting TKB access since the 1 July 2014 product launch. By encouraging both business owners and electrical workers to access TKB, important industry alerts and product recalls are reaching a much wider audience than through the traditional single member contact point.

TKB provides a more user-friendly way to solve queries; saving our members time and reducing the frustration of not having the information needed to finish a job.

Fresh new content

NECA is regularly updating TKB with articles based on the topics members are searching for and asking for help with, as well as product recalls and industry hot topics.

When members login to TKB, the 'Latest updates' area on the homepage alerts them to new content, which they can view with a single click.

TKB's key features

- Access to Wiring Rules and eight additional Australian Standards.
- Ability to search the current WA Electrical Requirements (WAER).
- Ability to search the current WA Distribution Connections Manual (WADCM).
- FAQs and comprehensive articles referencing Australian Standards, the latest product recalls and industry alerts.
- Entire archive of Energy Bulletins with searchable contents lists.
- 'Submit a request' – send queries and photos/drawings to NECA Technical for personalised assistance.
- A fully searchable, convenient self-service product, accessible via computer and smart devices, 24/7.



Mark Hogan reflects on 40 years of PHE

Mark Hogan took over as managing director of PHE after his father, Pat, sadly died very suddenly: "It was a great shock and a difficult time. Our senior management and staff were tremendous, they pulled together and got on with business as usual by delivering to our clients."

Fortunately, the business was in great shape and over the past two years PHE has grown its client base and completed further major projects for its long term clients.

PHE specialises in industrial, mining, power, F&B, gas, manufacturing and packaging projects. PHE completes projects where the electrical component alone has ranged from \$1 million to \$100 million. Mark is sure that the ongoing success of PHE can be attributed to the commitment of its senior management and staff, and its clients.

Interestingly, Mark is not an electrician. He studied finance and spent half his career working the finance sector, and the other half working at PHE in a commercial capacity. Being a director of the company meant that even though he was not working there in the period leading up to taking over he was still familiar with the issues and challenges the business faced.

"Full and open dialogue is key in our business," says Mark.

"We have a workforce that understands our market. When things slow down they make their own plans to take on other projects – or even take a break. Then when things pick up again they take the first opportunity to come back to PHE," he adds.

When asked what the Federal Government could do to help businesses like PHE, Mark's answer is that they "should definitely increase infrastructure spending", as that leads to more jobs in the short and long term – and everyone benefits.

On the subject of non-compliant, or counterfeit, products, Mark is of the opinion that "you get what you pay for" and contractors owe it to their customers to do the due diligence and quality control on the products they install.

"If it's half the price of what you expected to pay, then there's probably a reason,"



he suggests.

Following in his father's footsteps, Mark is very keen to see the industry maintain, or even grow, the pool of apprentices. He supports the pre-apprentice courses and thinks the apprentices who take advantage of this experience in their last years at high school generally do well.

"They know what they are taking on and this seems to help them get on in those in the early years of their apprenticeships," he adds.

Many of our long term employees, started as apprentices. This development and retention helps us maintain and pass on our high quality and high commitment culture.

Maintaining some life balance is also important to Mark.

"When you have to travel each week for work, it's essential to get some non-work commitments into the diary. I agreed to coach my boys' Under 8 football team and at times this can feel as challenging as any business situation. But, seriously, it is a great way to make sure we all spend time together. I also sign myself up to things like charity rides – again to make sure I don't let being busy mean I never do anything but work," he comments, adding that it's not that work isn't a key driver in his life. It just can't be the only driver.

Two-and-a-half years into the job I asked Mark what he would have done differently now he's had a chance to reflect on things. His answer was "use technology better". Now fully appreciating how important it is to spend as much time as possible on site, he thinks his business needs to take that extra step to use technology to make them more efficient. And that could be anything from using Skype instead of face-to-face meetings and giving all team leaders iPads, so to more efficiently use our document management system for QA, day to day business and safety.

An excerpt from the 2012 NECA NEWS

PHE's founder, Pat Hogan, moved to Tumut in 1970, aged 20, to work on the Snowy Scheme at Talbingo.

From there he went to work for the local mill, CSR's Pyneboard, before starting Pat Hogan Electrical (PHE) in 1975. PHE is one of Tumut's business success stories, from humble beginnings, as an industrial and domestic electrical contractor, mainly working in the timber industry, PHEs reach would ultimately stretch across the globe. Pat built PHE from an owner-operated business into a company employing over two hundred people and able to take on a huge range of products – including some of the largest projects in the industry. Pat was also proud that PHE has been a significant employer of young people providing apprenticeships to 155 young people over the years – almost a third of which still work for PHE. ■

ACCI productivity initiative

The ACCI's Productivity Leadership Program is examining the potential gains that can be achieved by electrical contractors through a better understanding of the performance of their apprentices including:

- Ways to improve cost effectiveness of apprentices.
- Training options and alternatives.
- Impact of the quality of apprentice supervision.
- Impact of workplace relations arrangements, i.e. EBAs versus Fair Work Award rates.

The first stage of the Project has been used to determine the factors that have the most significant impact on an apprentice's productivity and commitment to completion. Information has been gathered through:

- Individual consultations with over 20 electrical contractors to confirm current employer views on the performance of their apprentices by way of one-on-one interviews of employers and their staff. This covered a range of those who employ directly, use only group training or a mix of both;
- Outcomes of focus group meetings held to identify current attitudes of employers in electrotechnology and to discuss possible strategic responses.

A range of factors have emerged from the consultations and focus

groups and the findings have confirmed that electrical contractors are experiencing a number of barriers that underlie productivity and retention, including:

- Employer perception that it is at times difficult to invest in training because of economic and building industry cycles and the nature of contracting work;
- A perception that many entrants to training do not have prerequisite skills, knowledge and aptitude;
- A lack of understanding of current and potential flexible apprenticeship arrangements;
- A belief that although career and training pathways currently available in the industry are largely appropriate there is a need to consider the requirements of an apprenticeship in light of increasing specialisation of work which is placing pressure on a broad based "whole of industry" skills learning pathway;
- Costs and understanding of workplace employment options including:
 - Increases to apprentices wages across the board resulting from recent Fair Work Commission decisions and higher wages and conditions for apprentices covered by Enterprise Based Agreements.
 - The increase and then large decline of intention to employ

mature age apprentices who are eligible for significantly higher wages.

- Introduction of Competency Based Progression which can lead to an apprentice completing early and provisions for competency based wage progression to fast track apprenticeships.
- Conditions that support mentoring, training and effective supervision of apprentices.

The information collected has been aggregated into a general response that will underpin the development and promotion of a range of tools, guides and manuals that can equip business with the skills and knowledge to improve the workplace productivity of their apprentices and for managing apprentices productively. The Project will conduct validation workshops (or consultations) with electrical contractors to:

- Examine the effectiveness of the identified tools in assisting business to improve business performance.
- Identify assistance and support needed by employers to apply the tools in workplace settings.

Based on the findings the Project will promote the strategies and enabling factors that can maximise the contributions of apprentices in the sector at all stages/or years across the duration of their indenture.

The Green Home Project

NECA is working with Sustainable Business Australia, along with its business partners – Connection Research, Object Consulting and APEX Australia – on Our Green Home Project. This is a Federal Government-funded national study designed to improve the understanding of how households can reduce electricity consumption with better tools and support.

We will need electricians across Australia to install electricity monitors in eligible peoples' homes. For further information speak to your NECA chapter or check out <http://www.objectconsulting.com.au/lieep/> for more details. ■

