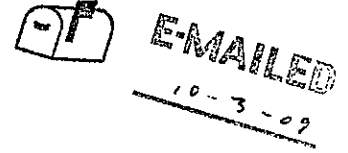




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9 March 2009



The Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP  
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

### **ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE – INSTALLATION OF CEILING INSULATION**

NECA welcomes the focus on energy efficiency in the recent 'Economic Stimulus Package'. However, NECA wishes to raise pitfalls that exist if appropriate safeguards are not deployed in conjunction with this initiative.

NECA is the national industry association representing contractors responsible for the delivery of an installation of electrical, voice and data communication systems in Australia. As such, members are responsible for the majority of electrical installation works in residential, commercial and industrial situations.

Whilst thermal insulation in ceilings is a relatively inexpensive way of reducing energy consumption in residential premises there are inherent dangers when installed inappropriately near electrical equipment and cables.

Whilst not the only safety issue by far the most dangerous is the risk of fire associated with installing thermal insulation over or in close proximity to recessed luminaires such as the halogen downlights which have become increasingly popular in residential premises over the past few years.

These light fittings run at very high temperatures and the incorrect installation of thermal insulation nearby has been the cause of many fires throughout Australia especially over the previous few years. The incidence of fires in houses has increased to the extent that the Australian Standard dealing with the installation of electrical equipment now has specific requirements for clearance of thermal insulation from such lighting sources.

The problem is not insurmountable and special protective barriers are now commercially available to ensure that these minimum distances are maintained.

Whilst electrical contractors are aware of these statutory requirements specified in the Australian Standards (AS/NZS 3000 2007, Clause 4.5.2.3) it is apparent that many installers of thermal insulation are not. NECA electrical contractors operating in the residential sector regularly report that installers of thermal insulation have covered the lights and have created a potentially dangerous situation. The fire services in the states will also have similar data.

The position is likely to be exacerbated with the large (planned 2.7 million) number of homes being insulated and the commensurate increase in the number of installers required to undertake this work.

NECA understands that there is no state or national licensing or registration system for 'qualified' thermal insulation installers like there is for electricians, plumbers, builders etc. However, NECA does understand that there are courses available through TAFE and possibly other sources which NECA believes should be a minimum eligibility requirement for the impending government program.


For example, there is a one-day course run by TAFE in Victoria for eligibility with the Sustainability Victoria ceiling insulation rebate program. This may be suitable as a minimum requirement for this Australian government initiative.

NECA also understands that the Government's intention is to pay the cost of the thermal insulation installation directly to the installer. This gives the Government the opportunity to make it a condition of the payment that the installer of the thermal insulation met the minimum criteria specified above.

Also, NECA recommends that the Government provides guidance to the general public about the need to ensure that the installers undertaking the work do have the required accreditations.

NECA would like to offer its services to assist with ensuring our sector of the building industry is aware of the program and not just thermal installation installers.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James C Tinslay', written in a cursive style.

James C Tinslay  
Chief Executive Officer  
NECA