



Don't be a live wire

The electrical industry is risky. Because of this, the safety of workers is paramount. **Garth Stewart**, an OHS manager working in the electricity industry, sets out the key factors to meet minimum safety standards.

One of the most worrying issues in the industry is the willingness of electrical contractors to work 'live'.

This work takes place in high-risk areas, some of which have not been assessed beforehand. Safety plans and controls, as paramount as they are, usually become disregarded.

Time and competitive pressures when working on jobs adds to the dangerous mix. When clients employ electricians, it is universal that the client expects minimum disruption to the business or that the work be finished quickly and on time.

While clients appreciate the dangers of electricity, they usually expect that contractors meet their legal obligations through use of their own management plans. Because of these overall expectations, electricians may hesitate to inform clients that work cannot be performed safely. The overall fear is that clients will seek out another contractor who is willing to negate their responsibilities to do the work.

"It is under these circumstances that clients are encouraging contractors to negate their legal responsibilities. Both the clients and electrical contractors are, in fact, taking the risk by creating an unsafe workplace contrary to occupational health and safety legislation," said WA's National Electrical and Communications Association's (NECA) OHS manager Garth Stewart.

"Electrical contractors do not need to work 'live', as almost all electrical work does not require live circuits. There are circumstances in which live work can be legally performed if a safe work plan is developed. Nonetheless, NECA strongly recommends that contractors never work live."

It's a plan

"Many electrical industry employers do not have safety management plans or procedures. Where such systems are in place, injury frequency and severity rates are reduced considerably," he said. "Consequently, there is an implied obligation that safe work procedures

should be developed, implemented and reviewed when necessary."

Safety on the job

Safety is up to both the employer and employee — for employers to provide a safe workplace, and for workers to observe safe work practices.

"The electrical employer is responsible for the safety of workers, subcontractors and clients, especially against electrical shock hazards. This involves not only a safe system of work, but providing the appropriate tools and training; protective gear and current safe working guidelines," Mr Stewart said.

An electrical employer must ensure that electrical work:

- Provides for the safety of persons,

including employees and contractors of the electrical employer;

- Avoids or minimises damage to property or exposure of persons to electric and magnetic field effects;
- Provides for the safety of domestic animals and livestock.

An employer must also develop and implement safe work procedures and practices as well as train and supervise employees and contractors and review work practices regularly.

Employees need to follow the rules for their own sake and the safety of fellow workers. Employees should also be aware that they do not have to carry a task if they feel they are not competent to do so. Report electrical accidents immediately



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Construction site work

The National Standard for Construction Work came into operation in 2008. Because electrical contractors work in this sector they also must meet the minimum requirements of the standard, which has introduced the following:

- Main contractors must ensure that a site-specific OHS management plan is prepared for each construction site where five or more people will be working. The plan needs to be in place before work starts, updated as the project progresses, and that each worker knows what the plan entails;
- The job foreman of high-risk construction work must provide the main contractor with a written safe work method statement (also known as a job safety analysis, or JSA). If no specific person has daily control on-site, then the task falls to the main contractor. The main contractor must

ensure that work is carried out safely and in accordance with the safe work method statement.

Mining code

Electrical accidents are the third highest cause of accidents on mine sites, so it is no wonder that the mining industry is very strict when it comes to OHS.

“The mining industry has its own code for working with electrical equipment, known as the Electrical Safety Management System,” Mr Stewart said.

“Some aspects of the system are: that only an authorised person can cut the electricity supply; the mine manager has to inform electrical inspectors of an electricity supply that is to be introduced or re-introduced; all installations, equipment, construction and testing must meet Australian Standards; all licensed people can carry out electrical work; and that sufficient electrical supervisors are appointed.”

In addition, electrical records must be kept, including an electrical log book

which displays all plans and locations of high-voltage cabling and equipment, main switches and low voltage and high-voltage cables installed in the ground and copies of compliance and test certificates for equipment.

These items are only a fraction of the whole system; however, electrical contractors are required to comply with all requirements under the Mines Safety and Inspection Regulations so that all possible measures are in place to control this high-risk industry.

Knowledge bank

For those wanting to bone up on the law, check out the following publications that set out the minimum requirements for all electrical contractors: *Electricity Act 1945; Electricity Regulations 1947; Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991; Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984; Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996; Mines Safety and Inspection Act 1994; Mines Safety and Inspection Regulations 1995 (part 5).* ■

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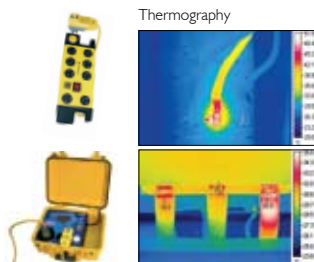
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