



# switched on

News for the industry from the Electrical Safety Council

issue6 Autumn 2007



**Flooding:** The electrical safety side of water damage

Also in this issue: Electrical safety abroad

## WELCOME



Welcome to the sixth issue of Switched On.

The flooding across large parts of the country during the summer, and the consequential problems with water supplies, brings to mind a line from the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink ..."

All of us at the Electrical Safety Council extend our sympathy to those who were affected by the flooding.

Although we could not help to solve the water supply problems, we were able to offer advice on what actions to take where flood waters had affected the electrics in homes and other premises.

The flooding resulted in a massive clear up operation, part of which it was important for the safety of electrics in affected properties to be checked before they were put back into service.

To help this process, with the support of the Chief Fire Officers'

Association, we quickly developed and published an advisory leaflet, which you can read about in this issue.

Looking to the future, the Council's Trustees have drafted a five-year plan for the charity.

Subject to the plan being agreed at the Trustees' October meeting, a summary will be published on our website, and also in the winter or spring issue of this magazine.

The plan, which sets out a number of strategic priorities, will be used to guide and support the staff and Trustees in managing the future direction and progress of the Council's work.

On a final note, I would like to thank Robert Postance of R. A. Postance & Sons and Paul Sewell of Paul M. Sewell for sending us photographs of poor electrical installation work. We will use these as appropriate to highlight the problems of unsafe electrics.

If you would like to send me pictures of particularly good or bad installation work, you can do so by emailing them to [philip.buckle@esc.org.uk](mailto:philip.buckle@esc.org.uk), or by posting them to me at our London office.

Phil Buckle Director  
The Electrical Safety Council  
18 Buckingham Gate  
London SW1E 6LB

## NEW CONSUMER HELPLINE LAUNCHED



We are pleased to announce the launch of a new consumer helpline designed specifically to meet the electrical safety needs and concerns of consumers.

The new helpline is open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays (except Bank Holidays). It is operated by two new full time members of our team, who respond to all telephone, email and written enquiries from consumers as quickly as possible.

The helpline also processes all requests for printed copies of our electrical safety literature, including leaflets and Best Practice Guides.

Although all of our literature is available on our website to view or download, we can supply up to 500 printed leaflets per organisation free of charge. A small charge will be made for larger quantities to cover the cost of printing and postage.

The helpline is unable to provide detailed technical advice. Consumers needing such advice will be advised to contact a registered electrician. Similarly, electrical contractors and installers seeking technical advice will be advised to contact their trade association or scheme provider.

The consumer helpline can be contacted by telephoning:  
**0870 040 0561**

Alternatively:  
Email [enquiries@esc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@esc.org.uk)  
Fax 0870 040 0560

Write to: **Consumer helpline**  
The Electrical Safety Council  
18 Buckingham Gate  
London SW1E 6LB



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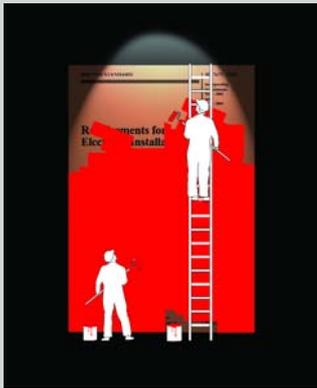
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# NEWS IN BRIEF



## Revision of BS 7671

The development of BS 7671: 2008, otherwise to be known as the 17th Edition of the IEE Wiring Regulations, was reported to be on programme at the end of July, with publication still expected in January next year.

All the 2,500 comments received on the Draft for Public Comment published at the end of last year have been considered by the committee responsible for the technical content of the British Standard, and the draft amended as appropriate within the constraints of the European harmonization process.

What should be a final update on the progress of the revision will be given in the winter issue of Switched On.

## Research into the in-service reliability of RCDs

ERA Technology has issued their final report detailing the results of their research and their conclusions concerning the overall reliability of 30 mA RCDs installed in domestic premises. The report includes details of the mechanisms that caused a number of RCDs to fail to operate under the in-situ test conditions.

The findings of the research will be presented at the Council's Annual General Meeting in October, following which a full breakdown and analysis of the results, along with ERA's final report, will be published on our website.

## NAPIT Registration Ltd



The Council has accepted an invitation from NAPIT Registration Ltd to provide independent members for their main scheme committee and technical sub-committee, in order to help them satisfy UKAS stakeholder requirements.

## Woman's Weekly

Earlier this year, a reader of Woman's Weekly wrote to the magazine asking for advice on having an electrical safety check when buying a new house.



In the response, Woman's Weekly, which is reportedly read by 811,000 people, referred to our *So You Think Your Home is Safe* booklet, and gave details on how to obtain copies.

As a result, we have received hundreds of requests for the booklet, with many of asking for additional copies to give to relatives and friends.

## British Approvals Service for Cables (BASEC)



The Council has become a member of the BASEC Certification Committee, which is responsible for ensuring the independence and impartiality of BASEC's services and for scrutiny of the detailed operation of their certification schemes.

## European Standardization System established

At the end of June, CENELEC and CEN agreed to form a new 'European Standardization System'.

The aim is to bring the two organizations closer together, ensuring that standards in areas that overlap their traditional electrical and non-electrical scopes are developed without duplication.

The move is intended to improve the efficiency of the two organizations, and to ensure that disputes that may arise between existing parts of the system are dealt with effectively.

See page 15 for further details.



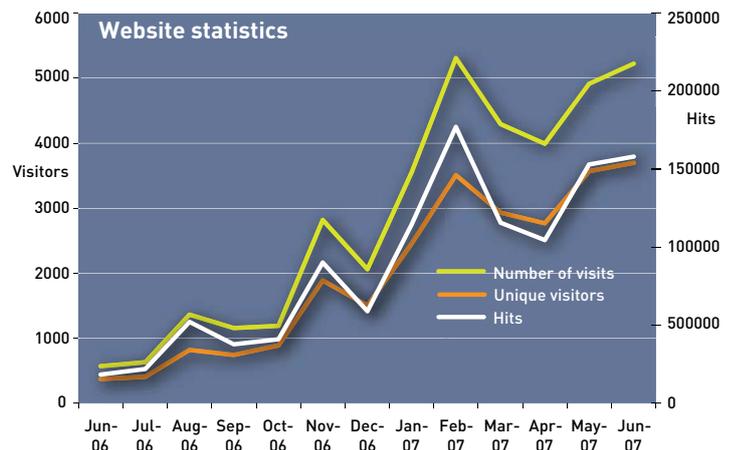
# SWITCHED ON TRIGGERS WEBSITE VISITS

“EACH ISSUE OF SWITCHED ON SEEMS TO TRIGGER AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF VISITORS TO OUR MAIN WEBSITE”

As can be seen from the statistics outlined below, each issue of Switched On seems to trigger an increase in the number of visitors to our main website, and a corresponding increase in the rate of 'hits'.

Hopefully, having read this issue, you will help to maintain this positive trend – new and interesting content is being added all the time!

And if you've not yet visited the site, give it a try – you might find something of real value to you there.



# DEVELOPMENT OF OUR MAIN WEBSITE CONTINUES

In our continuing efforts to ensure the information on our main website is understood by the widest possible audience, many of our regular pages are being rewritten and redesigned.

The new pages will show clear and concise information, with many minimizing the need to scroll down. This work is of vital importance to us because the main website is our primary means of communicating with the public.

The current theme of the home page focuses on electrical safety whilst travelling abroad, and gives visitors the opportunity to download our new travel leaflet.

We have also been busy adding new information to the site including advice for flood victims, the latest Best Practice Guide on connecting microgeneration systems, and a new section entitled 'Talk to us'.

The 'Talk to us' section is intended to encourage visitors to the website to share with us their experiences, views and feedback on anything relating to electrical safety.

We would especially like to hear about consumers' experiences with electricians and electricians' experiences with consumers, stories about electrical accidents or injuries, and views on the work of the Council, as well as ideas on new areas of work that we should become involved in. Movie clips and photographs are welcomed.

The information we gain from the new section will help us target our campaigns on the areas of most need, provide ideas for the production of new information and guidance, and support our PR and media campaigns.

As always, feedback on our websites is appreciated so, should you have any ideas or comments, please send them to us using the facility provided on the sites.



# EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS



The Council exhibited at three very different events in May and June.

## Commons Exhibition

In May, the Council had an exhibition stand in the Upper Waiting Hall of the House of Commons. The event gave us the opportunity to raise our profile among parliamentarians, and to make them aware of our charitable status and current activities. Our presence was sponsored by Andrew Selous MP, who attended the opening ceremony and spoke of his support of our objectives.

## BBC Good Homes Live

In June, BBC Good Homes Live, which was held at the NEC Birmingham in conjunction with BBC Gardeners' World Live, gave us another opportunity to discuss electrical safety issues with hundreds of consumers face to face, and to distribute a variety of literature.

Many of the consumers we met seemed to be more aware of the safety benefits of using RCDs than those at previous exhibitions, some even knowing of people who had been killed or injured as a result of cutting through the unprotected lead of a lawnmower or hedge trimmer.

However, there were many others who were still completely unaware of the benefits of RCDs. To those people, the Council offered a free plug-in RCD to use whenever working with electrical appliances in the garden. More than 700 devices were given away over the five days of the show.

## Trading Standards Exhibition

Also in June, our stand at the Trading Standards Conference and Exhibition in

Manchester attracted a variety of Trading Standards officers and other Local Authority officials. One area in which they were particularly interested was the implementation of Part P of the Building Regulations for England and Wales.

Another area of particular interest was product safety. In addition to our own activities in terms of research and improving product safety, we are keen to give information and advice to Trading Standards about the electrical safety of products, and to inform them of particular areas of risk.

The offer of assistance was well received by the officials we spoke to, and we look forward to progressing the new relationships.

## Grand Designs Live

In addition to exhibiting at the above events, we included 30,000 information packs in the promotional bags distributed at Grand Designs Live (held in London in June), to encourage visitors to the show to use our website as a source of reference and advice when planning a renovation project or new build.

# SAFETY AT CHRISTMAS

From faulty fairy lights to overloaded sockets, the festive season often brings an increased risk of electrical accidents and fires in the home.

In recent years, there has been an increase in complaints to Trading Standards about potentially unsafe Christmas lighting products, some resulting in public recall notices or the voluntary withdrawal of products by high street retailers.

This indicates to the Council that responsible retailers, when advised of possible dangers, fully recognise the risks associated with faulty electrical products and are willing to take the necessary action to put the safety of their customers first.

However, there are always cases where the authorities have to take immediate enforcement action to safeguard consumers by ordering a sales ban or the withdrawal of potentially lethal products from the market.

Following the testing of a selection of indoor Christmas lighting products last year, we received positive responses from all the

retailers we alerted about potential safety issues found with some of the products they were selling.

Many thanked us for bringing the safety issues to their attention, and confirmed that corrective action had been taken to help ensure that only products complying with the relevant safety standards would be offered to their customers in future.

In light of this success, and in support of this year's 'Keep Britain safe at Christmas' campaign, we intend to continue with our seasonal product testing programme - this time focusing on outdoor Christmas lighting products.

We believe that our work in this area will not only help to raise consumer awareness of the potential safety issues when buying electrical products, but also encourage best practice amongst manufacturers and suppliers who place electrical products on the market.

But festive lighting is not the only possible additional source of danger at Christmas time. Extension leads and adaptors used to provide

extra power points for all the new electrical gadgets are another area of increased risk. They not only have the potential to overload the wiring, but can also be a tripping hazard.

We recommend that householders try to minimize the use of extension leads and multi-way socket adapters, and to turn off festive lighting and other electrical equipment when not being used.

We further recommend that, before reusing them, householders carefully check any Christmas lighting products they put away last year, and to replace them if they show any signs of damage or deterioration.

Finally, we recommend that all decorative lighting products are kept out of the reach of young children.

A full report detailing the findings of this year's Christmas lighting product testing, together with valuable consumer advice on how to keep safe at Christmas time, will be published on our website shortly.

# GUIDE FOR CONSUMERS WHEN ORDERING DOMESTIC ELECTRICAL WORK

The Council has been working with the Institution of Engineering and Technology



to develop a guide for consumers when they need to order electrical installation work in their homes.

The guide, entitled 'Guide for consumers when ordering domestic electrical work' contains general tips and advice, a 'quotation request' form, and a handy 'jargon buster'.

The form enables consumers to outline the electrical work they want undertaken and, amongst other things, to detail any constraints on time and money, to help provide a firm basis on which electricians can be invited to quote. It also provides a record should any problems arise later.

As reported on page 10, electrical services and installations are at eighth place in Consumer Direct's list of the top ten complaints about home maintenance and improvements. Many

of these complaints are due to communication problems between consumers and contractors.

So in helping consumers to communicate their requirements more clearly, the new guide should also help to avoid subsequent misunderstandings and disputes. It should also help electricians provide more detailed quotations, as they will have more information about their customers' expectations and constraints at the outset.

The jargon buster will help consumers to decipher some of the technical terms commonly used by electricians in their quotations.

The guide, complete with the quotation request form, can be downloaded for use from the Council's website.

## TRAVEL ADAPTOR TESTING CONTINUED...

In the summer issue of Switched On, we published the initial findings of an independent specialist laboratory we had commissioned to test a selection of travel adaptors that are readily available on the UK market.

In its final report, the laboratory confirmed its opinion that several electrical safety hazards exist in all but one of the six UK to foreign adaptors tested, in that live parts can be exposed to touch when a single plug pin is inserted into one of the current-carrying socket apertures. These hazards do not exist with 13 A socket-outlets fully conforming to the UK product standard, BS 1363.

One hazard identified by the tests is that the insertion of a single plug pin opens the safety shutters, enabling access to a live part as shown below.



The tests also identified that, for five of the adaptors tested, the dimensions of the socket apertures (for the insertion of the line and neutral plug pins) exceed those specified in the UK product standard.

The increase in the size of the apertures appears to be designed to permit the insertion of two-pin UK shaver plugs. These have circular pins that are more closely spaced than the current-carrying pins of a standard 13 A plug. Standard 13 A socket-outlets will not accept a two-pin UK shaver plug.

To protect users against accidental contact with live parts, the UK product standard requires that 13 A socket-outlets are designed and constructed to ensure that the pins of a plug can be inserted only in the intended way, so as to engage with all the corresponding socket contacts.

However, as a consequence of the increase in the size of the apertures, this safeguard is not afforded in most of the travel adaptors tested,

it being possible to insert the earth pin of a standard 13 A plug into either of the current-carrying apertures, as shown below.



If a Class I (earthed) electrical appliance is plugged into an energised adaptor in this way, metallic parts of the appliance that are accessible to touch will become live, presenting a real and immediate risk of electric shock.

Furthermore, for four of the adaptors tested, it is possible to insert only one of the current-carrying pins of a standard 13 A plug into the modified socket apertures of the adaptors, as shown below. This presents another real and immediate risk of electric shock from the other current-carrying pin when the connected appliance is switched on.



Finally, further inspection revealed that, for three of the adaptors, it was possible to insert both the current-carrying pins of a standard 13 A plug incorrectly, as illustrated below.



Apart from the hazards that might result from reversed polarity, connection of a Class I appliance in this manner would leave it unearthed, introducing the risk of electric shock in the event of an earth fault.

In the Council's opinion, therefore, travel adaptors that do not incorporate all the safeguards provided by socket-outlets conforming to the UK product standard BS 1363 are electrically unsafe.

We have drawn the findings of the report to the attention of those responsible in the supply chain for the safety of the particular adaptors concerned, and also to the Department of Trade and Industry (now the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform).

Whilst the investigation has uncovered significant electrical safety hazards common to most of the adaptors tested, it also identified a travel adaptor, purchased from Boots\* (own brand, Model No. 319L) that did not present any of the hazards described above. This adaptor was found by the laboratory to meet all their safety assessment criteria.

A summary of the findings, together with the full laboratory report, can be viewed on our website.

We will be monitoring the situation to see whether the suppliers of the travel adaptors concerned take appropriate action to remove the electric shock risks that their adaptors are currently presenting to UK consumers travelling abroad.

\* Other travel adaptors not included in this research might also meet the laboratory's safety assessment criteria, but our tests were limited to those adaptors randomly selected for assessment.



Photos provided by West Midlands Fire Services.

# Flood Damage and Ele

“ Water and electricity can be a lethal combination. It is therefore important for all those affected by flooding to be aware of the potential dangers ”

**D**uring the severe and unexpected flooding that occurred across wide areas of the UK in June and July, the Electrical Safety Council was able to offer essential electrical safety information and advice for the thousands of homes and other premises affected. According to press reports, about 30,000 homes and 7,000 businesses were affected. Many thousands more were flooded in July.

Water and electricity can be a lethal combination. It is therefore important for all those affected by flooding to be aware of the potential dangers so that they can take appropriate precautions when dealing with the electrics in flood damaged property, to help ensure their own and their family's safety.

The advice, in the form of a press release, was extracted from a new leaflet we were drafting at the time, which was intended for publication later in the year. As a result of the widespread summer flooding, however, the leaflet was completed and published as a top priority.

The leaflet, which is supported by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA), is concerned primarily with the potential dangers associated with electrical installations and appliances affected by water, but it also contains other useful practical advice for flood victims.

## The advice given in the leaflet includes:

- Making sure the property is safe before entering
- Having a torch at hand when entering the property – and not attempting to switch on the lights or use candles
- Switching off the electricity supply at the consumer unit (fuse box)
- Arranging for other services such as gas to be turned off and advising that these services should remain off until advised by the providers that it is safe to turn them back on
- Contacting their insurance company (and landlord, if applicable) to tell them what has happened, and to get advice and take instruction
- Seeking professional advice about the restoration of the property, before clean up commences
- Not attempting any electrical repairs or connection of temporary supplies themselves
- Using a registered electrician to assess the condition and safety of the electrical installation and of any fixed and portable electrical appliances affected by the flood, before they are put back into service.



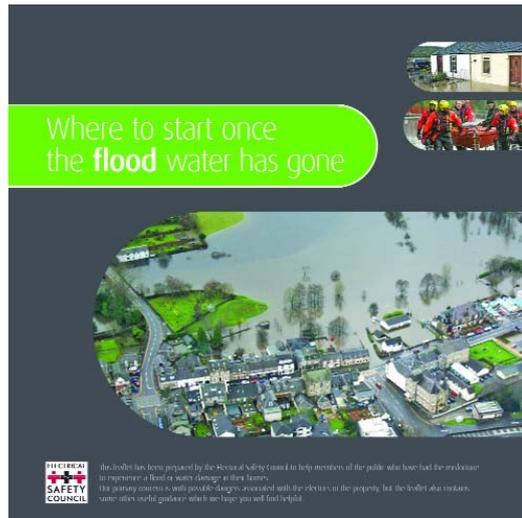
# Electrical Safety

If the water damage to the fixed wiring is relatively minor, it is possible, once the wiring has dried out, that an electrician will just need to replace the water-affected electrical accessories such as socket-outlets and switches.



However, if there is major flood damage, the affected parts of the property may need to be rewired. Where this is necessary, householders should ask their electrician about the possibility of raising the height of all the previously-affected equipment including the wiring, socket-outlets and, in some instances the consumer unit (fuse box), to minimize the effect any further flooding may have on the electrics.

We have received a number of requests for copies of the leaflet, including one from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) for use in an awareness campaign it is running from October, aimed at school children throughout Scotland.

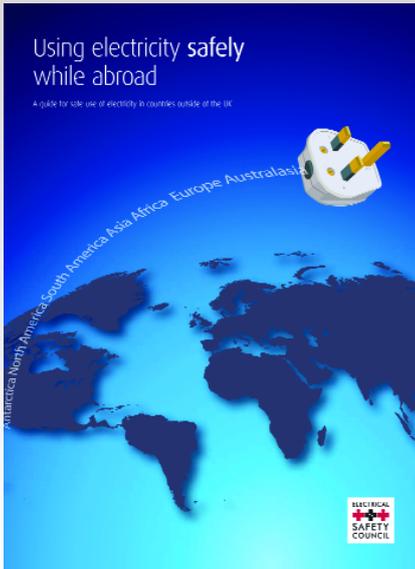


Copies of the leaflet can be downloaded from the 'safety in the home' section of our website: [www.esc.org.uk](http://www.esc.org.uk)

**Alternatively, printed copies can be obtained by sending an email request to [leaflets@esc.org.uk](mailto:leaflets@esc.org.uk) or by phoning us on 0870 040 0561.**



# USING ELECTRICITY SAFELY WHILE ABROAD



Whilst in general the UK enjoys high electrical safety standards, the same cannot be said for some other parts of the world. And even in countries where the standards are comparatively high, differences such as in the design of plugs and sockets, and in the supply voltage and frequency, can put the unwary at risk.

With this in mind, we have produced a new guide for UK consumers on the safe use of electricity while abroad.

The guide tells consumers what electrical hazards to look out for in hotel rooms,

bathrooms and by swimming pools, and provides a 'know before you go' checklist and a few simple safety rules. It also answers a number of frequently asked questions such as 'Can I use UK electrical equipment abroad?'

The guide also includes a map showing the different voltages and frequencies to be found worldwide.

Copies of the new guide can be downloaded from the 'safety leaflets' section of the 'Safety in the home' drop down menu on our website: [www.esc.org.uk](http://www.esc.org.uk)

# HOME MAINTENANCE TOPS LIST OF BRITAIN'S CONSUMER GRIPES



Since the launch of government advice service Consumer Direct in 2004, home maintenance complaints have been consistently at the top of the list of UK consumers' gripes.

Consumer Direct is a telephone and online consumer advice service managed by the Office of Fair Trading and delivered in partnership with local authority Trading Standards Services. Last year, the service took more than 1.7 million calls and emails from British consumers.

Consumer Direct is the first port of call for consumers seeking advice on a range of consumer matters, including advice before shopping, information on consumer rights and practical guidance on individual problems and how to gain redress.

Of the 74,000 calls and emails received about home maintenance suppliers last year, the top three complaints and enquiries concerned general building work (17503 cases), fitted kitchens (12819 cases) and central heating (6995 cases), while electrical services and installations came in at 8th place with 2997 cases.

Christine Cryne, Director for Consumer Direct said: 'The complaints that we receive often come about because of communication difficulties between the client and the trader. Our advice to consumers looking for a trader is always the same: do your homework, take recommendations from friends and family, look for traders approved by a reputable body or registered with a government or local authority approved scheme. Make sure you get written quotes for all work requested and be clear about your needs. If you follow these simple steps, you can go a long way to avoiding the main pitfalls.'

The aim of Consumer Direct is to give people the knowledge, tools and confidence to be able to resolve matters themselves. Where further help is needed, such as specialist advice, face-to-face assistance or intervention,

Consumer Direct will refer consumers to local authority Trading Standards Services or other agencies that are best placed to assist. By handling the bulk of first tier enquiries, Consumer Direct enables these services to focus their resources on those people that have most need of their expertise.

The information and advice helpline is available on a single national telephone number - 08454 04 05 06 from 0800 – 1830 Monday to Friday, and 0900 – 1300 Saturday, excluding bank holidays and public holidays.

## Complaints and enquiries to Consumer Direct about home maintenance and improvements in 2006

General building work	17503
Fitted kitchens	12819
Central heating (inc installation and servicing)	6995
Plumbers and plumbing	6661
Fitted bathrooms	6117
Roofing	4610
Tarmacing and paving	4448
Electrical services and installations	2997
Damp proofing	1679
Replacement doors	1656
Guttering	1655
Fascias	1346
Decorator services	1264
Insulation	1199
Solar heating	1069
Burglar alarms	1040
Wall coating	1020
<b>Home maintenance and improvements total</b>	<b>74078</b>

# MORE PART P PROSECUTIONS

Earlier this year, Local Authorities prosecuted three more contractors for failing to comply with the electrical safety requirements of the Building Regulations for England and Wales.

In one case in March, a builder was fined £25,000 plus costs when Rochdale Council's Building Control Service took legal action because of the risk his electrical work could pose to the public.

Before taking him to court, the service had offered the builder the opportunity to put the work right, but he failed to do so.

He was found guilty of five breaches of building regulations relating to electrical installation work carried out in a house. A number of the breaches were for dangerous work. One was for damage to the cover of the main electrical supply, leaving access to live wires.

The builder appealed against the size of the fine but, when he failed to attend the appeal hearing in May, the appeal was dismissed and he was ordered to pay a further £3,700 towards the Council's costs.

In another case in April, an electrician was prosecuted by Epping Forest District Council

for contravening Building Regulations when rewiring a property.

The owner of the property requested the Council's Building Control Officers to investigate when he became concerned that the rewiring work might not be safe.

A competent person employed by the Council found a number of significant deficiencies in the work, which resulted in the prosecution.

The electrician pleaded not guilty to failing to carry out the works such that the design, installation, inspection and testing was of a standard that would protect others from fire or injury.

He was found guilty at Harlow Magistrates' Court of failing to carry out electrical work to the standard required by the Building Regulations and was fined £3,500.

At an earlier hearing, the electrician had pleaded guilty to two other offences of not making a Building Regulations Application to the Council prior to commencement of the work, and not giving the Council the required 48 hours' notice prior to its commencement.



He was fined £500 for each of these offences and was also ordered to pay the Council's prosecution costs of £1,400.

In the third case in July, a kitchen installation firm was fined £3,000 for sub-standard electrical work carried out in a Staffordshire home last November. The firm had claimed to be registered with a competent person scheme, but this was found to be untrue when Stafford Borough Council investigated a complaint about the standard of the work.

## APPROVED CONTRACTOR SCHEME CONTINUES TO THRIVE



When the Approved Contractor scheme was established by the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) in 1956, there were only about 3,500 contractors on the Roll, and only 14 Inspecting Engineers (one for each of the then Area Electricity Boards).

Then, as now, the Approved Contractor scheme covered the whole of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

Many of the original contractors on the Roll had been inherited from the National Register of Electrical Installation Contractors. This body

had been set up in 1923, but was evidently faltering in the period leading up to the formation of the NICEIC. At its peak in 1938, the National Register had about 1,700 electrical contractors on its books.

With informed specifiers being the main driving force, encouraged by the Inspecting Engineers of the day, the number of Approved Contractors on the Roll grew steadily from 1956, reaching a total of some 10,500 by the end of 2004.

At that time, with the government clearly signalling the introduction of the electrical safety requirements in Part P of the Building

Regulations for England and Wales in January 2005, the number of enrolled contractors began to rise quite sharply, reaching a total of almost 14,000 by the end of July this year.

Over the years, the number of Area Engineers responsible for assessing contractors against the Rules Relating to Enrolment has increased correspondingly, now standing at 71.

Since the Electrical Safety Council was formed from the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting in 2005, the Approved Contractor scheme has continued to be operated under licence by NICEIC Group Ltd, its wholly owned subsidiary.



Although the Council currently operates exclusively within the United Kingdom, the Channel Isles and the Isle of Man, it maintains liaison with like-minded organizations in other parts of the world.



In May, the Council hosted the Annual General Meeting of FISUEL, the International Federation for the Safety of Users of Electricity, of which it is a member.

FISUEL, which was founded in 2002, has four main objectives:

- To promote electrical safety by helping to ensure the conformity of installations with standards
- To help those countries which do not have any system of inspection to put one in place, and to help those that do have a system in place to improve it
- To progress the setting up in various countries systems for the periodic inspection of older installations, and
- To provide information about electrical safety

Its 28 members include a variety of electrical safety bodies from Europe, Africa, Asia and South America.

According to information gathered by FISUEL, in Europe:

- 60 % of residential buildings are over 25 years old. The majority of the electrical installations have never been inspected and tested, or updated
- 120 million electrical installations are more than 25 years old, and cannot be considered to be safe
- 16,000 injuries and 540 deaths are caused each year by electrical accidents.



Also in May, the Council met with representatives from the Japanese Federation of Electrical Safety Inspection Associations (FESIA) to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The FESIA representatives were particularly interested to learn about the statutory and other requirements governing electrical safety in the UK.

They also wished to know how the competence of electrical contractors was assessed in the UK, as electrical inspection work in Japan had recently been opened up to competition.

The Electrical Safety Research Institute (ESRI) of South Korea requested a meeting with the Council in August to learn more about electrical installation standards and practice in the UK. ESRI is a central government agency which undertakes electrical investigations, research and technology development projects.



ESRI is part of KESCO, the Korea Electrical Safety Corporation. KESCO is a very large government organization created to protect the lives and properties of consumers in South Korea, and to ensure safety in workplaces. They perform legal inspections and services on electrical installations with the aim of preventing accidents and detecting potential safety issues.



# GOVERNMENT PROPOSES LONGER TIME LIMITS FOR BUILDING REGULATIONS PROSECUTIONS

At the end of July, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a consultation document in which they propose to extend, from six months to two years, the period within which local authorities can bring prosecutions for breaches of Building Regulations requirements in England and Wales.

The proposals seek to achieve better compliance with building regulations by providing a more effective deterrent to non-compliance. They will create no new burdens for fully compliant businesses.

The proposals follow the government's launch earlier this year of a major modernization of the Building Control system in England and Wales with the publication of a paper, 'The Future for Building Control'.

The paper detailed its vision for how the system can be improved, and recognized a number of shortcomings in the current system. Problems with achieving compliance and with effective enforcement were highlighted as key areas for action.

The background to the latest consultation, as explained in the consultation document, is as follows:

*In recent years, concerns have been expressed at the effectiveness of the building control system in England and Wales, and in particular at its ability to ensure compliance.*

*Ensuring compliance can be achieved in a number of ways: clear and effective standards and guidance should enable those carrying out building works to do them in a way which complies from the start; effective and*

*proportionate building control supervision (including assistance and advice on site to those carrying out building works) should achieve compliance with the requirements.*

*But where things go wrong, and the process of informal interactions or more formal communications between building control and those carrying out works fails to achieve compliance, or where there has been deliberate evasion, and a breach of the regulations results, formal enforcement or prosecution action may become necessary.*

*Much can be achieved through the powers contained in section 36 of the Building Act which give a local authority power to serve a notice on a building owner to require the removal or alteration of non-compliant work.*

*However, where the person carrying out the work (such as an electrical contractor or a contractor carrying out electrical work as an adjunct to their business) is a person other than the building owner, action taken under section 36 penalizes the building owner because of the extra expense of carrying out remedial work, not the person who carried out the work and who therefore had committed the breach.*

*In some circumstances prosecution is therefore justified. Prosecutions are relatively infrequent and are generally taken only for flagrant or wilful breaches.*

*But it is important that this small minority of cases can be pursued effectively both to influence those directly concerned and send a signal more broadly about the importance of adhering to reasonable minimum standards in the interests of the health, safety, welfare and convenience of persons in or about buildings*

*and in securing the energy efficient performance of buildings.*

*Because prosecutions must be brought in a magistrates' court, they must comply with the rules relating to such courts. Currently, the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 requires that any prosecution in a magistrates' court must be brought within six months of the date the offence was committed.*

*Consequently, local authorities must bring prosecutions under section 35 of the Building Act for breaches of building regulations within six months of completion of the offending work.*

*Representations have been received from local authorities and others that this can operate as an obstacle to effective enforcement, given that there can be latent breaches or those discovered after the expiry of the six months' time limit. Such a regime can be difficult to administer when the pressure of normal building control work can crowd out resources for prosecution.*

The government proposes to take powers to introduce the longer prosecution time limits as soon as there is a legislative opportunity.

The consultation document can be downloaded from [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk). The consultation period closes on 23 October.



# GRANTS FOR ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

The pilot for the Council's Electrical Installation Safety Improvements Grants scheme continues in England and Wales. The rate of grant applications has risen significantly such that, at the end of July, we were processing more than 30.

A number of successful grant applicants have had their electrical installations inspected and tested by registered contractors appointed by the Council, and orders have been placed for urgent remedial work identified in the condition reports to be carried out by other appointed registered contractors (to help ensure that the condition reports are objective).

From the information provided in the reports, deficiencies identified during the inspections and tests commonly include the following:

## Earthing and bonding

- No main equipotential bonding to metallic service pipework, such as gas and water
- No supplementary equipotential bonding in bathrooms.

## Wiring systems

- Vulcanized rubber insulated cables with the insulation at terminations being hard and brittle

- No circuit protective conductor in lighting circuits with Class I luminaires and switches installed
- Circuit protective conductors of twin and earth cables cut short (preventing connection) at Class I lighting fitting and accessory positions.

## Protective devices

- Incorrect rating of overcurrent protective devices for final circuit conductor sizes, for example a 32 A circuit-breaker installed for a 2.5 mm<sup>2</sup> radial circuit
- No RCD protection on socket-outlets which may reasonably be expected to supply portable equipment for use outdoors.

## Distribution equipment

- Access to live parts not prevented by fuseboard main covers, and an ingress protection level of IP 4X not maintained on the top surface of fuseboard enclosures.

## Problem installations

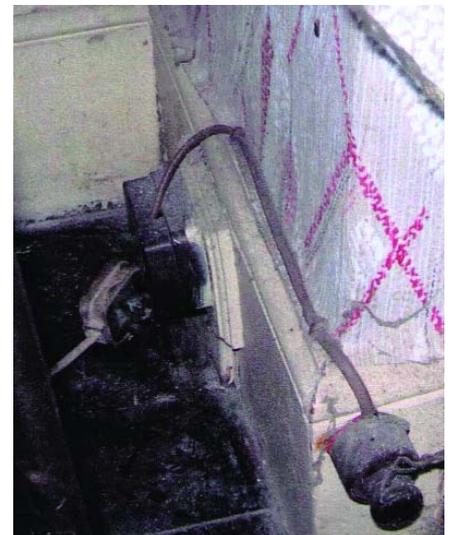
A few of the installations inspected and tested were found to be in very poor condition due to their age, the type of wiring system and/or the lack of adequate maintenance during their service life.

It was originally intended to limit the budget available to rectify any one property to £800,

so as to enable the maximum number of applicants to benefit from the funds allocated to the grants scheme. However, the cost of the remedial work required to restore to a safe standard the most unsatisfactory installations found could be well in excess of that sum.

We are therefore urgently investigating how best to assist the affected homeowners to restore their electrical installations to a safe condition within the budgets available.

*Part of a working installation inspected, which is more than 50 years old*



If you wish to be a sponsor for our grants initiative or you would like further information, please email [grants@electricalsafetycouncil.org.uk](mailto:grants@electricalsafetycouncil.org.uk) or phone us on 0870 040 0561.



## THE HOME INFORMATION PACK

In the last issue of Switched On, we reported that the government had announced that the introduction of Home Information Packs (HIPs) would be delayed pending revision of the requirements.

This was due to a judicial review being requested by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in relation to the Energy Performance Certificates. The government has since reached an agreement with the RICS which has put the judicial review on hold, and allowed the implementation of HIPs to go ahead.

## Regulations

In June, the government laid revised Home Information Pack Regulations 2007 before Parliament to replace those regulations that had come into force in April.

The revised regulations state that the requirement to have a Home Information Pack (HIP) including an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) when a home is marketed for sale will be rolled out in phases according to the size of the property, measured by the number of bedrooms.

The government plans to implement HIPS in three phases:

- Homes with four or more bedrooms.
- Homes with three bedrooms.
- All other homes.

The revised regulations will allow, until the end of 2007, a property to be marketed in advance of getting an EPC, although the seller has an obligation to obtain one as soon as possible and certainly by the time contracts are exchanged. Also, the maximum age of an EPC when a property is put on the market has been extended from three to twelve months.



# NEW ERA FOR EUROPEAN STANDARDIZATION

At their general assembly meetings in June, CENELEC and CEN decided to strengthen the values and principles of European Standardization by forming a 'European Standardization System', which they intend to be open, flexible, dynamic and able to meet the challenge of emerging technologies in an ever more globalized world.

The first actions to be implemented will focus on:

- Ensuring the cost efficient and effective use of resources to better deliver European Standards and other European standardization products more efficiently in order to support market innovation, achieve both a coherent approach to standardization in new areas including converging technologies and a consistency in standards development
- Establishing a Working Group tasked with achieving more streamlined rules for the development of European Standards, with particular attention to the involvement of all stakeholders, and to create a high-level mechanism to solve the technical issues that arise from the standardization of emerging and converging technologies
- Raising the global visibility of the European Standardization System. CEN and CENELEC

agreed to establish a common Committee to consider external issues and to create the function of a European Standardization System Officer who would lead its activities

- Exploring what should be the future attitude of the European Standardization System to conformity assessment (through which the compliance of products and services with European Standards is assured) and how the initiatives of the European Commission and EFTA to strengthen market surveillance can best be supported
- Enhancing the promotion and the branding of the European Standardization System in order to improve the recognition of European Standards and to attract new business sectors in the further development of the system to the benefit of all European stakeholders and citizens. A special Working Group has been established to develop the tools for a promotional campaign.

Through these actions, CENELEC and CEN intend to increase the efficiency of the European Standardization System, strengthen the support to the international standards bodies, and enable a united response to the challenge of supporting the long-term competitiveness of Europe in the global economy.

CENELEC, the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization, is a non-profit technical organization composed of the National Electrotechnical Committees of 30 European countries. Its mission is to prepare voluntary electrotechnical standards that help develop the Single European Market/European Economic Area for electrical and electronic goods and services, removing barriers to trade, creating new markets and cutting compliance costs.

CEN, the European Committee for Standardization, is a similar but larger organization which contributes to the objectives of the European Union and European Economic Area with voluntary standards other than electrotechnical standards. These are intended to promote free trade, the safety of workers and consumers, interoperability of networks, environmental protection, exploitation of research and development programmes, and public procurement.

Under the new arrangements, CENELEC and CEN will remain as separate legal entities.

## Implementation

The first phase commenced on 1 August 2007 requiring all homes with four or more bedrooms marketed on or after 1 August to have a HIP. Any property put on the market before 1 August will not need to have a HIP. However, the government plans to set a date when all properties that remain on the market will be required to have a HIP.

The second phase commenced on 10 September. No firm date has been set for the roll out of the final phase. The decision will

be based on whether sufficient Home Inspectors and Domestic Energy Assessors have been certificated or accredited to meet the demand.

Following the welcome news that government had agreed that the information contained in Building Regulations Compliance Certificates issued under competent person self-certification schemes is to be included in HIPs, it appeared that progress was also being made as a result of our campaign for electrical safety information to be included also.

We are now concerned that the delays and revisions could further fuel the case against HIPs, and bring into question the government's commitment to producing a fair and consistent buying and selling process.

We will continue to monitor the progress of HIPs and to keep pressure on government to include details of the condition of electrical installations in the packs.

For the latest news on the Home Information Pack, visit :

[www.homeinformationpack.gov.uk](http://www.homeinformationpack.gov.uk)



Following the launch of our children's website [www.switchedonkids.org.uk](http://www.switchedonkids.org.uk), we are pleased to report that it has been very well received by the public and media up and down the country. The launch was co-ordinated to coincide with our sponsorship of Child Safety Week in June.

General media coverage received during Child Safety Week highlighted the electrical dangers faced by children and their families in their homes, and signposted readers to our children's website to encourage parents and children to take some simple safety precautions.

The media attention involved us in giving a number of radio interviews and receiving press coverage from regional newspapers across the UK, reaching an audience of more than 3 million people.

The children's website also received a mention in the family section of the Guardian newspaper.

Everyone involved with supporting Child Safety Week, including its organiser, the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT), agreed that the Week was a great success, helping to raise awareness across the UK of how to prevent avoidable accidents and injuries suffered by children each year.

In further support of Child Safety Week, as reported in the summer issue of Switched On, we ran a crossword competition, and also produced a number of electrical safety promotional materials aimed at children.

We received a large number of entries to the crossword, and 10 lucky winners were each awarded a store voucher worth £25.

A number of requests for the children's promotional material were received from people ranging from child minders and healthcare practitioners, to parents and teachers.

The promotional material includes an A3 size poster giving electrical safety tips to children, as well as a 'spot the electrical hazards' colouring sheet and a 'wordsearch' quiz.

Copies of the children's electrical safety promotional material are available to download from our children's website at: [www.switchedonkids.org.uk](http://www.switchedonkids.org.uk)

Alternatively, printed copies can be obtained by sending an email request to [leaflets@esc.org.uk](mailto:leaflets@esc.org.uk) or by telephoning 0870 040 0561.

## UNSAFE ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS



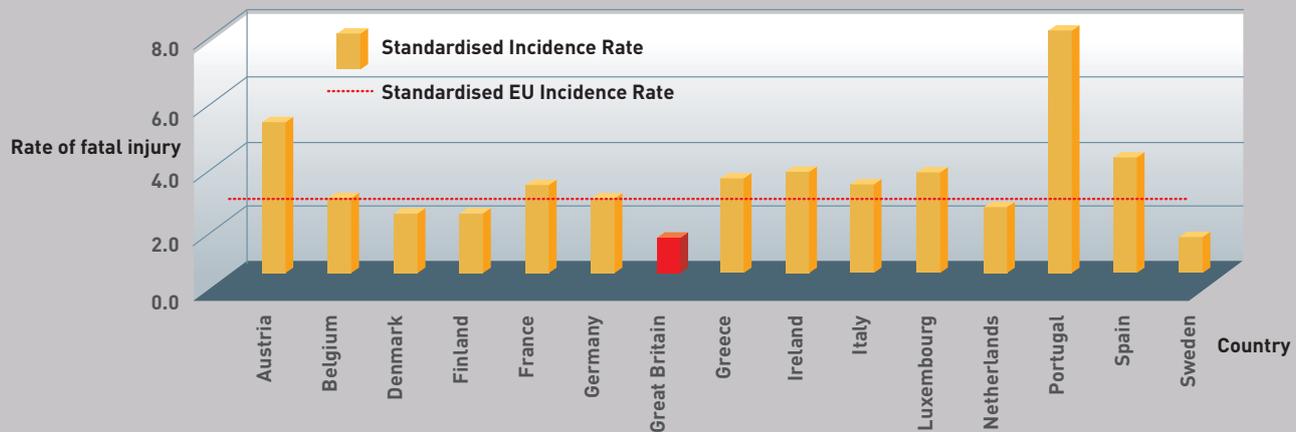
Anyone who believes that they have purchased a product in the UK that is electrically unsafe should contact their local authority trading standards office in the first instance.

However, we would also like to be kept informed of concerns about the electrical safety of any product recently bought on the UK market.

Please email details to: [productsafety@esc.org.uk](mailto:productsafety@esc.org.uk)

or write to us at:  
Product Safety  
The Electrical Safety Council  
18 Buckingham Gate  
London, SW1E 6LB

# EUROPEAN COURT SUPPORTS UK SAFETY LAWS



EU comparisons for rate of fatal injuries

In June, the European Court of Justice upheld one of the key elements of British health and safety law – the use of the key phrase "so far as is reasonably practicable". The phrase is used, for example, in the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.

The Court rejected the European Commission's claim that the use of "so far as is reasonably practicable" did not implement a European Directive. The UK successfully argued that it has been effective in protecting people, as currently it has the best occupational safety record in Europe.

The HSE continues to believe that the right way forward is a proportionate and risk-based

approach to protecting employees and others effectively, whilst allowing commonsense to be applied when deciding on what protective measures to adopt.

The European Commission challenged the use of the phrase because the directive, which lays down EU employers' duties to protect the health and safety of their workers, has no such qualification.

The 'so far as reasonably practicable' wording has been a long standing feature of English law, and predates even the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. According to the HSE, it introduces flexibility into the law and contrasts with some other

Member State legal systems where the law is written in absolute terms but courts can apply flexibility and proportionality in their judgements.

Great Britain's achievements in health and safety performance are commendable on an international basis. Though some care is needed when making comparisons between countries, the EU has published the chart, above, showing the annual rate of workplace fatalities in 15 Member States (2003 figures).

On this basis, Great Britain has the lowest rate of 1.1 per 100,000 workers compared with the EU average of 2.5.

## TECHNICAL LIAISON WITH UK BODIES

In order to address technical issues of common interest to the UK electrical installation sector, the Council maintains liaison with a number of other industry bodies, including the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA), NICEIC Group Ltd and SELECT (the Electrical Contractors' Association of Scotland).

In particular, the IET, ECA and SELECT have observers at the quarterly meetings of the Council's Technical Committee, and we have observers on the equivalent committees of the ECA and SELECT.

Separately, we have quarterly liaison meetings with the IET to discuss technical issues of mutual interest.

In May, we hosted a meeting between representatives of the Technical Committees of the Council, ECA and SELECT with a view to resolving differences expressed at meetings of the 'Wiring Regulations' committee (JPEL/64) about the draft requirements for the protection of cables in walls and partitions to be included in BS 7671: 2008.

The outcome of the meeting was successful, with the compromise wording agreed at the meeting subsequently being accepted by the JPEL/64 committee for incorporation in the revised standard.

Another such meeting aimed at resolving differences about the inclusion of guidance in BS 7671: 2008 on the application of the regulations to ring and radial final circuits was held in July. Again the outcome of the

meeting was successful, with detailed diagrams being developed for further consideration by the committee responsible for the technical content of BS 7671.



## COUNCIL SPONSORS RoSPA CONGRESS

The Council is pleased to be sponsoring RoSPA's Annual National Home Injury Prevention Congress for the second successive year. The Congress will be held in Cheltenham on 12 and 13 November.

This year's theme will be 'Delivering National Agendas through Local Partnerships'.

Topics will range from negotiating equitable partnerships and rolling out good practice and effective methods of evaluating home injury prevention activities, to exploring

methods of collecting and disseminating data and maximizing joint funding opportunities.

Events at the Congress will include the presentation of outstanding examples of effective partnership working and their impact on national agendas, as well as a number of workshops and exhibitions.

For more information about RoSPA's National Home Safety Congress visit our website, or contact RoSPA direct on 0870 7772120.



## THE COUNCIL REPRESENTS UK CONSUMER INTERESTS IN CHINA



In support of its product safety campaign, one of the Council's staff attended the International Consumer Product Safety Conference held in Beijing in May.

The conference, organized by the International Consumer Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO), was unique as it was the first International Consumer Product Safety Conference to be held in China, bringing together over 400 delegates from Europe, China, Japan, USA and Canada.

The conference was held in conjunction with the Administration of Quality Supervision Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) of the Peoples Republic of China.

The theme of the conference was 'Consumer Product Safety, Our Common Responsibility!' This set the scene for consumer product safety professionals from all over the world to conduct exchanges, communication and discussion on issues of common concern, and especially in the three popular fields of electrical appliances, toys, and household appliances.

The conference heard from a range of international speakers dealing with different aspects of the safety of electrical and electronic goods. Speakers included VIPs and high-ranking officials from legislative bodies and administrative authorities from China, USA, Europe and Japan.

During the opening speeches, European Commissioner for Consumers, Meglena Kuneva, via video message, welcomed the initiative to arrange the international consumer product safety conference for the first time in China

She added *"It is vital that public authorities and producers across the world maintain a continued focus on international cooperation on product safety, to ensure consumer confidence in an open market. As the theme of the conference highlights, consumer product safety is our common responsibility as policy makers, business and consumer representatives."*

The conference took place amid growing concerns over the rise in the number of electrical products exported from China that are considered to pose a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers.

Indeed, the European Commission, in its 2006 annual report on dangerous non-food products notified through its rapid alert system (RAPEX), indicated China as the country of origin for almost half of all dangerous products entering the European Market.

The conference therefore presented an ideal opportunity for the Council to establish better communication and collaboration on consumer product safety, right at the heart of one of the biggest exporters of consumer products to the EU.

We intend to increase our presence and influence at such international events in order to be able to represent the electrical safety needs of UK consumers at the highest level, and also to ensure that the Council establishes itself as a leading and respected body on electrical safety matters within the international product safety arena.

### What is ICPHSO?

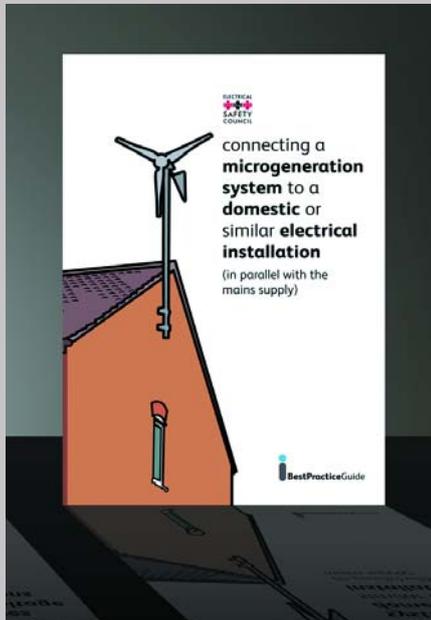
The International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO) was founded in 1993 as an organization dedicated to addressing health and safety issues related to consumer products marketed globally.

ICPHSO is the only organization which attracts an international membership of health and safety professionals who meet annually to exchange ideas, share information, and take leadership roles in addressing health and safety concerns affecting all consumers.

ICPHSO members represent government agencies (local, state, federal, international), manufacturers, importers, retailers, certification and testing laboratories, law firms, academia, standards writing organizations, media, and consumer advocacy groups.

# BEST PRACTICE GUIDES

Since the summer issue of Switched On was produced, the Council has published its Best Practice Guide on the increasingly hot topic of connecting microgeneration systems to domestic and similar electrical installations.



The new guide, the third in the series, was produced in association with a wide range of other leading industry bodies having a particular interest in the subject, these being:

- BEAMA Installation
- British Gas
- CORGI
- Electrical Contractors' Association
- Energy Networks Association

- Health and Safety Executive
- Institution of Engineering and Technology
- Local Authority Building Control
- Micropower Council
- NICEIC Group Ltd
- Renewable Energy Association
- SELECT (Electrical Contractors' Association of Scotland).

The aim of the guide, entitled *Connecting a microgeneration system to a domestic or similar electrical installation*, is:

- to provide an overview of microgeneration rated at up to 16 A per phase, operating in parallel with the mains supply
- to provide information on the legal and contractual issues related specifically to installation of microgenerators (including the relationship of the consumer with the energy supplier and the electricity distributor), and
- to give guidance on the specific electrical issues that arise when installing or connecting a microgenerator.

Copies of the guide can be downloaded free of charge from the 'business and communities' section of our website, and also from the websites of several of the other contributors.

Copies of the first two Best Practice Guides in the series can also be downloaded from our website: [www.esc.org.uk](http://www.esc.org.uk)

- *Replacing a consumer unit where lighting circuits have no circuit protective conductor\**
- *Safe isolation procedures for low voltage installations.*

Work on another guide, *Electrical installations and their impact on fire precautions in buildings*, is underway. This guide is expected to become available before the next issue of Switched On is published.

Work has also commenced on the development of guidance on the subject of recommendation codes for domestic periodic inspection reports.

Further Best Practice Guides may include replacing domestic consumer units, dealing with the effects of flooding, avoiding the dangers of asbestos, and plug-in socket-outlet testers.

News about the development and availability of these and other guides will be announced from time to time on our website, and in future issues of Switched On.

*\* Following further feedback from users on this first Best Practice Guide, This Guide has been updated for a second time. The version of the Guides on the Council's website will always be the latest.*

## PERIODIC INSPECTION REQUIREMENT EXTENDS TO ALL HMOs

A new law\* comes into force in England on 1 October that requires persons managing 'Section 257' Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to ensure that the fixed electrical installations in those premises are inspected and tested by a competent person at least every five years. The installations must also be maintained in a safe condition and good working order.

Furthermore, those managers must obtain a test certificate on the condition of the installation from the competent person, and must supply a copy of it to the local housing authority within seven days of receiving a written request.

'Section 257' HMOs are HMOs to which section 257 of the Housing Act 2004 applies. These are buildings that have been converted entirely into self-contained flats and for which:

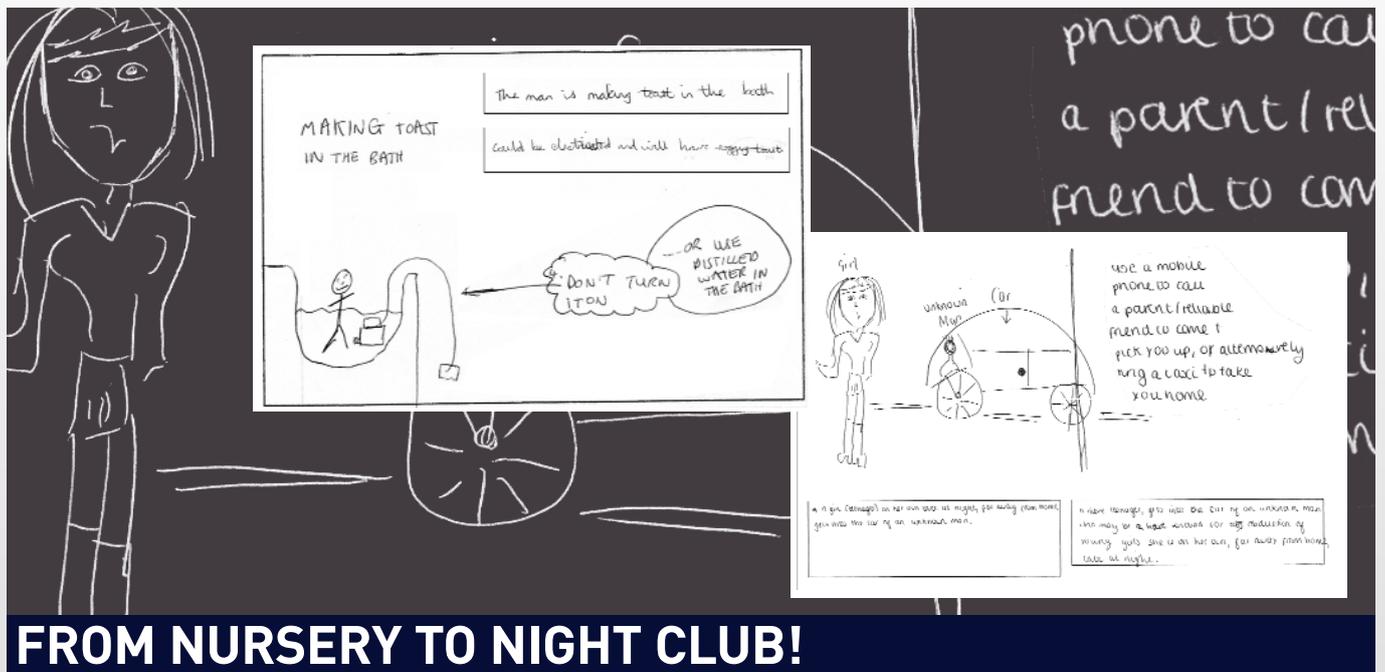
- the standard of conversion does not meet at least that required by the Building Regulations 1991, and
- less than two thirds of the flats are owner-occupied.

The requirement for the periodic inspection of electrical installations had already been extended to all other types of HMOs (shared houses, bedsits etc) under previous regulations. The new regulations extend the requirement to all HMOs.

Anyone failing to comply with the requirements can be prosecuted by the local housing authority and, upon conviction, can be fined up to £5,000 for each offence.

For further information about the laws relating to private rented accommodation, landlords should contact their local authority.

*\* The Licensing and Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Additional Provisions) (England) Regulations 2007.*



As previously reported in Switched On, we are working with RoSPA to promote safety in the home (see page 18 for details).

As part of this initiative, the RoSPA Home Injury Prevention committee met at the Council's London office. At the meeting, Jenny McWhirter, RoSPA's safety and risk education adviser, spoke about her research into young people's understanding of risk.

One of the key principles of effective safety education is that of the 'spiral curriculum'. This principle is fundamental throughout education and means that every topic or subject should be built into the very earliest stages of formal education, and revisited and reworked throughout a child's school career.

The knowledge shared, the language used, the skills practised and the attitudes explored should be appropriate for the age and stage of the learner. These must become increasingly specific, challenging and complex as the learner develops.

However, none of this is possible without knowing what children and young people themselves bring to their education about safety and risk. Jenny's research showed vividly how children's understanding of risk can be explored. Using this information a risk education curriculum can be built around what young people know, half know and have misunderstood – or where they simply lack experience.

Understanding how children and young people perceive and explain risk can help teachers and other professionals prepare children for the risks they face at home, at school, in workplaces and in the wider world - everywhere in fact from the nursery to the nightclub!

The pictures shown above are from Jenny's research, where she invited young people aged 11-18 to draw someone their own age doing something risky. They were asked to write down what was happening in their picture and what made it risky, and then to put themselves in the picture and write down

what they would be doing or saying to help themselves and others.

In the first picture, a young man of 17 has shown, through humour, that he has got the message that electricity and water don't mix!

He also appears to have picked up information about the poor conductivity of distilled water, but we recommend you don't try it at home!

In the second picture, a young woman, aged 16, expresses her concern about personal safety and suggests how to manage the risk.

It's good to see adults having a positive role to play in this example, as adults are more often seen by young people as being there to nag and punish over safety issues, rather than to offer them helpful advice and support.

If you want to know more about the research and Jenny's role, visit RoSPA's safety education website: [www.rospace.com/safetyeducation/index.htm](http://www.rospace.com/safetyeducation/index.htm)

## BACK ISSUES OF SWITCHED ON

All the previous issues of Switched On are available to read or download from the 'business and community' section of our website, [www.esc.org.uk](http://www.esc.org.uk)

