

# Electrical safety in construction

A Summary Guide for the Construction Industry on Safe Isolation Practices



## Introduction

When it comes to electrical safety on-site, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and other bodies are focussing particularly on safe isolation practices, which are a requirement of Regulation 13 of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. However, in many cases, the role of building contractors, designers, architects and others and the part they play in the overall construction process is also likely to be under scrutiny by the HSE.

The HSE recommends the adoption of the information in this leaflet and the associated leaflet 'Guidance on Safe Isolation Procedures'.



## What is the Electrical Safety Council?

The Electrical Safety Council is a consumer safety body supported by all sectors of the electrical industry as well as local and central government. It deals with all electrical safety matters associated with electrical installations and products on behalf of consumers. It also works with the electrical industry to promote safety amongst installers and is an independent, non-profit making organisation, registered as a charity.

The Electrical Safety Council is a driving force in the field of electrical safety for the protection of consumers, working with industry and other organisations to improve standards and promote best practice.

## Electrical Installation Contractors

Following a number of deaths and major injury accidents involving electricians, electrical installers are under renewed pressure to fully comply with their statutory health and safety duties, in particular in relation to electrical safe working practices. Leading bodies in the sector have undertaken an increased role in raising awareness of key safety messages to electrical contractors.

The effect is that electrical installers will not condone unsafe working practices, such as energising circuits before electrical installation is complete. This is sometimes done to accommodate building designers, clients, main contractors and/or finishing trades but this practice, except in some very specific circumstances where measures have been taken to prevent injury, will mean they are breaking the law.



## Building Contractors

Building contractors should be aware that they have duties in law under the Electricity at Work Regulations (made under The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). Regulation 14 in particular is relevant in requiring that work on or near live circuits, where there is a risk of touching live conductors, is only permissible where it is:

- unreasonable to work dead
- reasonable to work live, and where
- suitable precautions have been taken to prevent injury.

Note that 'reasonable to work live' should not be considered acceptable solely on grounds of inconvenience, lost time or cost. Electrical contractors will only be able to energise circuits for use by others, before their electrical installation work is complete, when:

- there is a written request from the main contractor or his agent, and
- the circuits have been fully inspected, tested and verified as safe to use, and
- the electrical contractor agrees it is safe to do so.





Where electrical circuits are energised following the above process, the building contractor's duties in law extend to ensuring that persons or trades entering the area in question are made aware of the extent of the live services within it. They also have a responsibility to ensure that their electrical sub-contractors implement safe isolation procedures where electrical services are energised prior to completion and handover of the installation.

## Further information

The leading electrical industry organisations, in conjunction with the HSE, have also produced a guidance document on this subject called 'Guidance on Safe Isolation Procedures'. Copies of this can be obtained from ECA , NICEIC or SELECT and explains in detail the requirements for acceptable practices when working on or near live electrical systems in buildings, particularly in the final stages of construction.

This leaflet was sponsored by the following organisations:



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