

Safety and health alert

09/00 unqualified tradesperson tampering with electrical equipment/accessories

Incident

A Morley woman received a severe electric shock when she touched live wires left exposed by a self-employed carpenter in February 1999. She and her partner occupied the house during renovations and extensions.

A self-employed carpenter with over 10 year experience replaced a sliding door with a hinged door on the lounge room the day before the accident. The carpenter removed the light switch from the wall and fed it through a hole cut in the architrave. After securing the architrave to the wall he went home for the day leaving the light switch hanging off the wall.

Next morning the woman entered the lounge room and automatically reached for the light switch without looking and received an electrical shock resulting in six days in hospital.

Factors

1. The light switch was detached from the wall exposing live wires.
2. The electrical supply was not isolated from the main switch.
3. The carpenter was not an electrical trades person and was not aware of the procedures for working with live switches and power outlets.
4. There was no risk assessment procedure to identify the hazard and to inform the people not involved with the work, of those hazards.

Unqualified persons should not interfere with electrical equipment.

The Office of Energy Western Australia, advised this practice is a breach of the Electricity [Licensing] Regulations and they prosecute offenders.



Recommendations

Builders and main contractors must plan their projects in order to avoid such risks. Ensure that in consultation with health and safety representatives, health and safety committees, self-employed persons and employees, that electrical work is well planned and only carried out by a licensed electrical tradesperson.

When working around electricity or during construction work at a site where residents and visitors are exposed to construction hazards:

1. Turn off the main switch to isolate the electrical supply and lock out or tag the main switch (locking out and tagging information is available on WorkSafe Western Australia's Safetyline Online Internet site on www.safetyline.wa.gov.au).
2. If any electrical equipment/accessories such as light fittings or power outlets expose bare electrical wires, contact a licensed electrical tradesperson immediately to rectify or isolate the equipment.
3. Assess the working environment and work methods before starting work and before leaving the workplace. Isolating areas and signage can effectively prevent people not familiar with construction hazards entering those areas at any other time.
4. Install, if practicable, a Residual Current Device specifically designed to protect the light and power circuits during renovation when persons not directly involved with the work (such as residents, children and visitors) are exposed to construction work.
5. Implement a practical reporting system to inform the residents of the day-to-day hazards of the site.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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