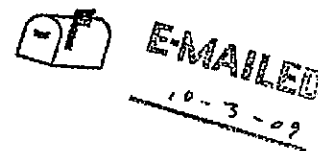




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9 March 2009



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.

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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

James C Tinslay
Chief Executive Officer
NECA



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

C09/5224

Mr James Tinslay
Chief Executive Officer
National Electrical and Communications Association
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ST LEONARDS NSW 1590

20 APR 2009

Dear Mr Tinslay

Thank you for your letter of 9 March 2009 to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, concerning the installation of ceiling insulation. I have been asked to reply on the Minister's behalf and I apologise for the delay in responding.

You may be aware that the guidelines for the Australian Government's Energy Efficient Homes Package clearly state that the insulation installer must follow the wiring and minimum clearance distances as stated in clause 4.5.2.3 and figure 4.7 of the AS/NZS 3000:2007 standard.

However, as you have stated in your letter, despite this requirement in the guidelines there remains the risk of new installers not being appropriately trained in procedures to satisfy this and other legal requirements. To ensure that all installers are appropriately trained, the Government is currently developing a training program for new entrants to the insulation industry based on existing units in the current nationally endorsed training package. As a part of this, tradespeople with no insulation experience who are making a shift to insulation installation will require a two day supplementary training.

The Government does, however, appreciate NECA's offer of its services and as a result, NECA has been added to the stakeholder register for the Energy Efficient Homes Package. Organisations on this register are approached by the Government on an as-needs basis for advice, consultation and information dissemination on various aspects of the Energy Efficient Homes Package.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Keefe
Assistant Secretary
Home Energy Branch
(April 2009)



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Media Release

NECA emphasises safety when installing insulation after economic stimulus package passed

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has called on home owners to ensure any insulation installed in their premises as a result of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's economic stimulus package, is done so with safety in mind.

As part of the economic stimulus package proposed on 3 February, Prime Minister Rudd announced a housing energy efficiency plan that would include free ceiling insulation for more than 2.7 million homes across Australia. The plan is claimed to reduce a household's average annual energy bill by \$200 and to create jobs for insulation installers.

While NECA welcomes the focus on energy efficiency and appreciates that insulation must be installed by an installer who owns or is employed by a registered business operating in the installation of thermal insulation, it warns about the risks of electrical fire when insulation is not installed correctly.

NECA National CEO, Mr James Tinslay said, "NECA is strongly committed to the move toward energy efficient homes but there is significant risk of electrical equipment overheating especially in the event of down lights in ceilings being covered if insulation is installed inappropriately. This is a very real fire hazard."

"To guarantee the safety of home owners and occupiers, we cannot emphasise enough the importance of using properly trained insulation installers. We also strongly recommend a licensed electrical contractor be consulted to ensure that existing electrical wiring and other installations are protected," Mr Tinslay said.

NECA is also encouraging homeowners to go one step further and have a complete home energy efficiency assessment as there are many steps beyond the installation of insulation and solar hot water – rebates for which are also part of the package – that can be taken to reduce energy costs.

"NECA has introduced the EcoSmart Electricians program to train licensed electricians in energy efficient and environmentally friendly electrical products, technology and installations. EcoSmart Electricians are available to advise on the best options for energy efficiency outcomes and now is a good time to make a complete review of new ways to reduce energy usage – don't just stop at insulation," Mr Tinslay said.

NECA is the peak body representing the interests of electrical and communications contractors Australia-wide. With offices in every state, NECA employs specialists in industrial relations, occupational health and safety, management, education and training, human resources and technology to provide its 5,000 members with representation and support in industrial relations matters and advice on a range of topics.

For further information go to www.neca.asn.au. For information about EcoSmart Electricians go to www.ecosmartelectricians.com.au.

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Ends

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James Tinslay, NECA National Office
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16 February 2009



Media Release

NECA warns of fire and electrocution dangers when installing insulation

Following the death of an insulation installer in Brisbane last week, the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has again warned consumers of the extreme dangers associated with installing ceiling insulation, recommending that a licensed electrical contractor always be involved.

NECA national chief executive officer, Mr James Tinslay, said there has been a considerable increase in the installation of ceiling insulation into Australian homes since the Australian Government announced its ceiling insulation scheme earlier this year. "While NECA is strongly committed to the move toward energy efficient homes, it is important that homeowners are aware of the risks involved in installing insulation and that they address the potential impact of insulation on existing electrical wiring," Mr Tinslay said.

"When the government ceiling insulation initiative was announced, NECA immediately recognised the potential dangers for householders that could arise with unqualified insulation installers not recognising the fire and electrocution risks," he said. "We advised Minister Garrett of our concerns and recommended appropriate training be mandated for insulation installers and that the public be made aware of the danger and the need for using accredited installers."

"Most consumers fail to realise that when insulation comes into contact with or conceals wiring, downlights and fans there is always a risk of fire. Unsuspecting insulation installers, or anybody working in the roof cavity, are in danger of being electrocuted by hidden live electrical wiring," Mr Tinslay said. "These dangers have been tragically highlighted with the electrocution and death of an insulation installer last week and a reported increase in the number of house fires caused by insulation in recent months."

"To guarantee the safety of home owners and occupiers, we cannot emphasise enough the importance of using a properly trained insulation installer with a licensed electrical contractor to ensure that existing electrical wiring and other equipment is safe and protected," Mr Tinslay added.

To avoid risk of electrocution and fire, NECA recommends the wiring in the roof space is checked by a licensed electrical contractor before insulation is installed to ensure there is no potentially dangerous wiring and again after the installation is complete to ensure the insulation hasn't interfered with the wiring or other electrical equipment.

"NECA electrical contractors are well trained and experienced to carry out these checks and provide advice on the safe installation of insulation," Mr Tinslay said. "As the industry's peak body, consumers can find a licensed, trained electrician in their area on our website, www.neca.asn.au. It is vital that the safety of homeowners and occupiers is not compromised and our members are well placed to assist."

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23 October 2009

Media Release

Electrical peak body calls for quick action on new safety inspection standards to combat dangers of installing insulation

Peak electrical contracting body, the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), today called for urgent action by Federal and State Governments to introduce new safety inspection requirements for the insulation installation industry.

NECA again raised its ongoing concerns of the risk of serious injury, death or house fires associated with the installation of insulation at its National Executive meeting, held in Melbourne and attended by representatives of the NECA National and State/Territory member organisations, which represent some 6,000 contractors employing more than 100,000 electricians nationally.

NECA has warned governments and consumers on a number of occasions in recent months of the dangers associated with installing insulation in roof cavities where cabling is present. The recent Federal Government stimulus package measures have exacerbated these problems without the establishment of adequate enforceable inspection safety measures and placed home owners and occupiers in serious danger.

NECA national chief executive officer, Mr James Tinslay, said it was time to take urgent action in addressing this problem, which is now recognised by all governments. "We have been working with the Federal Government and our Industry Skills Council to raise the nationally-recognised training standards to take account of electrical and communications cabling issues and other occupational health and safety matters specific to our industry," he said. "These need to be implemented urgently and require fast-tracking through the lengthy national training system process."

Mr Tinslay went on to say, "However, the industry considers training initiatives in themselves are not sufficient to meet all the safety issues that have come to light. NECA recommends that all installation of insulation in roof cavities involve a compulsory pre-installation inspection by a registered electrical contractor and a follow-up inspection at the completion of installation. This inspection would then need to be signed by the consumer and installer and filed with the appropriate State or Territory authority. The federal department operating the scheme could then undertake random risk assessment audits to ensure the process is addressing the identified problems."

"In the interests of safety and saving lives, and avoiding the potential for house fires, NECA recommend this proposal be established as soon as possible. The small additional costs involved will be more than compensated by lives saved. We look forward to discussing this proposal with Federal Minister Garrett as soon as possible," he said.

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26 November 2009

**Media Release
for immediate release
5 February 2010**

Federal Government must act following another death

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has today renewed its warning to consumers and again called on the Federal Government to act on the extreme dangers associated with installing ceiling insulation, following yesterday's death in north Queensland.

NECA National chief executive officer, James Tinslay said, "Yesterday's tragic incident, a 25-year-old insulation installer electrocuted while working in a ceiling at Millaa Millaa, is the fourth death nationwide associated with the Rudd Government's Home Insulation Program.

"NECA has repeatedly tried to warn the Government of the dangers of installing insulation near power cables. The recent Federal Government stimulus package measures have inadvertently exacerbated these problems and the lack of enforceable inspection safety measures have placed insulation installers, home owners and occupiers in serious danger.

"We have worked with the Federal Government to raise the nationally-recognised training standards to include risk assessment of the electrical dangers.

"However, the industry considers training initiatives in themselves are not sufficient to meet all the safety issues that have come to light. NECA recommends that all installation of insulation in roof cavities involve a compulsory pre-installation inspection by a registered electrical contractor and a follow-up inspection at the completion of installation. This inspection would then need to be signed by the consumer and installer and filed with the appropriate State or Territory authority. The federal department operating the scheme could then undertake random risk assessment audits to ensure the process is addressing the identified problems.

"The Government's decision to ban metal clips with metal foil insulation was not much more than a bandaid on a serious wound, especially in Queensland where metal foil insulation is the norm.

"In the interests of safety and saving lives, and avoiding the potential for house fires, NECA recommends this proposal be established as soon as possible. The additional costs involved will be more than compensated by lives saved."

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Media

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**Media Release
for immediate release
9 February 2010**

Federal Government must conduct safety inspections on all potentially live houses

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has called on the Federal Government to immediately conduct safety inspections on all 37,000 houses that have been fitted with foil insulation under its Home Insulation Program.

NECA National chief executive officer, James Tinslay said, "It is estimated that five per cent of the roofs have been found to be live. These are potential death traps and despite Minister Garrett announcing that he has suspended the use of foil insulation, all houses need to be checked and audited.

"NECA considers it essential that all houses having tin foil insulation installed under the Federal Government package be inspected to determine whether the tin foil in the roof space is live.

"Tin foil insulation is in itself not dangerous when installed with care to manufacturer's instructions. This clearly has not been done to date. NECA believes that where tin foil insulation is going to be used, an electrician needs to be engaged to check the existing condition of the cabling in the roof space, and then after the insulation is installed, to test to see that the job is electrically safe and the tin foil not alive.

"NECA calls on the Federal Government to institute an audit and testing regime involving a check by a licensed electrician to ensure that there is no danger of the insulation becoming alive and hence the risk of electrocution, shock or fire."

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- ends -

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James Tinslay Chief Executive Officer 02 9439 8523 / 0411 250 187



**Media Release
for immediate release
11 February 2010**

NECA welcomes safety inspections

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) has welcomed yesterday's announcement by Minister Garrett to immediately conduct safety inspections on more than 37,000 houses that have been fitted with foil insulation under its Home Insulation Program.

NECA National chief executive officer, James Tinslay said, "It is pleasing that Minister Garrett has now acted on our advice and households will be able to engage a licensed electrician to conduct a safety inspection, and, where required, rectify any identified faults.

"I am also pleased that households will be compensated for the associated costs.

"NECA was first to alert the Federal Government to the dangers associated with the Program back in early 2009 that it was strongly recommended that a licensed electrician be consulted to ensure that existing wiring and other installations are protected.

"I welcome the Government's action and we will continue to work closely and provide expert advice to Minister Garrett and his Department on related electrical matters under the economic stimulus package. This includes electrical safety concerns regarding foil and other insulation material and appropriate safeguards against potential ceiling fires."

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