

Overview

- Electrical Safety First is the UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by electrical accidents. We campaign on behalf of consumers and electrical trade professionals to improve electrical safety in the home.
- We welcome the opportunity to be part of the Scottish Government's Electricians' Working Group which was convened to explore the challenge of ensuring the safety of electrical installations.
- Electrical Safety First strongly recommends that, wherever you live, you use an electrician registered with one of the government-approved schemes for any electrical installation work in your home. In Scotland, this will usually mean that they are a member firm of the Electrical Contractors' Association of Scotland (SELECT) or registered with NICEIC. SELECT members and NICEIC registered electricians work to the UK national safety standard (BS 7671).
- There are some key challenges around consumer attitudes to using registered electricians and awareness of registration bodies. Our research suggests that a quarter of UK adults do not use registered electricians, and a third of adults have hired an electrician recommended to them without first checking their credentials.¹
- We fully recognise that sub-standard electrical work and failings in workmanship can and do result in death, injury and loss of property through fire. To this end, we would welcome measures which make identifying a registered, competent electrician easier for consumers, and which will be to the benefit of the whole of the electrical industry in Scotland.
- One proposal put forward is to provide title protection for electricians - which would make it an offence to claim to carry out electrical work if not qualified to use the title of electrician. However, research carried out by the Scottish Government shows that protection of title alone will be insufficient to bring about the level of behavioural change required, both from individual traders and consumers.
- Other proposals include: a new consumer register or mark, an increased emphasis on increasing consumer awareness and initiatives to make it easier to identify qualified and competent electrical professionals.
- Electrical Safety First is committed to working with others to find a way forward on the firm basis of protecting consumers' best interests. We therefore welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward a combination of activities which includes working with the sector to develop options for a consumer mark or register and considering the next steps for protection of title with the commissioning of independent research.
- But ultimately, industry will have to work as a whole to implement any necessary changes which aim to improve the safety of electrical installations in Scottish homes.

Safety of domestic electrical installations

- Three quarters of house fires - over 3,500 - are caused by electricity in Scotland each year. Of these fires - around 20% are caused by faults with the electrical supply.² Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell from the statistics how many any of these fires were caused by sub-standard electrical work and failings in workmanship.

¹ <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/registered-electricians/>

² <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/policies-and-research/statistics-scotland/>

- Aside from the information already provided by industry, research on the safety of domestic electrical installations is limited. The data collected from the latest Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS)³ suggests that there are no issues with domestic electrical installations but these conclusions are based on very basic visual inspections which are not carried out by electrical professionals.
- Our survey research with Scottish homeowners found that over 50% had low awareness of the importance of electrical safety and had not had their electrical installations checked in the last ten years. The risk of fire and electric shock can be reduced by ensuring the electrical installation is safe, which is best mitigated through regular inspection and testing.
- There is a clear disparity with standards for ensuring the safety of electrical installations across the different housing tenures in Scotland - only tenants living in the private rented sector are afforded protection by law with the requirement by private landlords to undertake periodic inspection and testing on 5-yearly basis. There is an understanding that the majority of social landlords follow best practice and carry out a similar testing regime.
- However, owner-occupiers in Scotland only have to abide by the very basic *Tolerable Standard* which states the electrical installation has to be 'adequate and safe to use' but does not require any formal inspection or testing to be undertaken.
- This demonstrates the need for a step change in consumer attitudes towards the importance of electrical safety and an acceptance for undertaking precautionary measures for testing and maintaining electrical installations, like there is for gas safety.
- There are some similarities between the gas and electrical sectors worth pointing out. From 1991, a statutory regime was introduced which made registration a legal requirement for gas operatives and businesses. Despite this, there was little change in the number of safety incidents involving gas⁴ and there were issues relating to prosecution of those who did not follow the legal requirements.
- A 2006 review of gas safety provided for the Health and Safety Executive concluded that the most important improvement to public safety could be delivered by implementing a properly resourced, targeted and focused carbon monoxide awareness campaign.⁵

Our Asks

- The Scottish Government should progress with their proposals to develop a consumer register or mark, and undertake independent research on the potential benefits of protection of title, in consultation with all parts of the electrical industry.
- Consumers should have a voice in this work and their interests should be at the forefront of the decision-making process.
- To ensure that consumers are protected, there needs to be rigorous and on-going assessment of competence of a registered electrician, by a third party, which helps enhance the reputation of the industry and gives confidence to the consumer.
- An on-going government-backed education campaign should be established to help change consumer attitudes towards the importance of electrical safety in the home.
- There should be consideration for a common electrical safety standard for housing with mandatory electrical installation checks across all tenures. This would enact a step change in consumer behaviour, while raising awareness of identifying and using registered electricians.

³ <https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SHCS>

⁴ [Review of Domestic Gas Safety](#), page 5 – report for HSE 2006

⁵ [Review of Domestic Gas Safety](#), page 37 – report for HSE 2006