

Electrical Safety Board Report 2007–08

The *Electrical Safety Act 2002* provides a legislative framework to help protect people and property from the risks associated with electricity. The Act establishes a Commissioner for Electrical Safety, an Electrical Safety Board and three committees: the Electrical Safety Education Committee; the Electrical Licensing Committee and the Electrical Equipment Committee. All committees report to the board.

Mr Jack Camp was appointed Queensland's first Commissioner for Electrical Safety in October 2002 for five years and he was reappointed for a further five year term in October 2007. The Commissioner provides independent electrical safety advice to the Minister and chairs and manages the board and committees.

The primary function of the board is to give advice and make recommendations to the Minister about policies, strategies and legislative arrangements for electrical safety. Board and committee members represent employer and worker organisations and the community.

Membership of the board and three committees is for a term of three years and will expire on 30 September 2008. Work is underway to appoint members of the new board and committees for the three year period commencing 1 October 2008.

Board membership

Chair

Mr Jack Camp

Chief Executive of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations

Mr Peter Henneken
Director-General

Representing employers

Mr Malcolm Richards
Chief Executive Officer, Electrical and
Communications Association, Queensland
Mr Bruce Lancaster
Estimator, Electrical & Instrumentation,
Commercial & Risk
United Group Ltd

Representing employees

Mr Dick Williams
State Secretary, Electrical Trades Union of
Employees, Queensland
Ms Michelle Burgoyne
Electrical fitter and mechanic
tutor with TAFE Queensland

Representing the community

Ms Cherie Dalley
President, Queensland Consumers Association
Councillor, Logan City Council
Mr Greg McNeill
Electrical contractor and safety and training
consultant
Member of the Mackay Regional Electricity
Council

Board activities and achievements

The Electrical Safety Board met six times during the year.

The board's goals in its *Electrical Safety Plan for Queensland 2003-08* included reducing electrical fatalities to below the national average and achieving a sustainable reduction in electrical incidents causing hospitalisation. These goals are being achieved. Fatalities in Queensland continue to be less than the national five year moving average.

Review of Electrical Safety Plan 2003 – 2008

On 23 April 2008 (following consultation with key stakeholders) board members, members of the Electrical Safety Education Committee and senior departmental officers attended a workshop to review the current *Electrical Safety Plan* which expires at the end of 2008. Discussions focused on electrical priorities and suggested strategies for the new plan. An outline draft of the new document was produced and noted by the board at its meeting on 5 June 2008. The final draft is expected to be submitted for approval to the incoming board on 16 October 2008.

Regulatory review

The board recommended amending the *Electrical Safety Act 2002* (the Act) and the *Electrical Safety Regulation 2002* (the Regulation) to ensure legislation continues to meet policy intent.

The amendments came into force during the year and some of them included:

The Act

- employers and self-employed to ensure their workers are appropriately licensed and to develop and keep a register of licensed electrical workers engaged
- clarifying provisions for seizure of unsafe electrical equipment by an inspector, forfeiture and returning unsafe electrical equipment
- a Regulation-making power to introduce a requirement for signage or advertising material for the hire or sale of electrical equipment.

The Regulation

- clarifying requirements surrounding the use of safety observers for performing testing work
- changing the connection notification requirements for low voltage electrical installations to include provision for a stated future date
- providing an alternative means of compliance with inspection requirements in cases of disconnect/reconnect low voltage installations where no electrical work is performed
- updating the licensing eligibility requirements for overseas electrical jointers and line workers under transitional arrangements aligned to national protocols.

Training matters

The board noted a number of issues that could impact the training of electrical apprentices. As a result the board recommended to the Electrical Safety Office that the auditors of registered training organisations be informed of these issues.

During the previous year, the board recommended to the Electrical Safety Office that an accredited course in “Low Voltage Switchboard Rescue” be developed after the need was identified. The matter was referred to the Department of Education, Training and the Arts which formed a course development advisory committee to address the matter. The course has now been prepared and submitted for accreditation.

Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) review of trade licensing

At their March 2008 meeting COAG endorsed a far reaching reform agenda for reducing the costs of regulation and enhancing productivity and workforce mobility in areas of responsibility shared by the Commonwealth and state.

The COAG Business Regulation and Competition Working Group (BRCWG) was established to consider matters including:

- regulatory reform in occupational health and safety
- reducing the regulatory burden
- addressing areas of regulation that impede national workforce mobility or skills acquisition, including through possible national systems for trade and professional qualifications and licensing.

Queensland’s principal objective regarding electrical trade licensing continues to be that the licensing system must provide high standards of electrical safety in this state and allows:

- effective compliance and enforcement including monitoring, prosecution and ensuring that licence holders have maintained skills before licence renewal
- flexibility to cope with changes in technology and process in the electrical industry
- continuing the financial contribution from licensing income to electrical safety.

The Queensland position was communicated by the Queensland representatives to the BRCWG. The Electrical Safety Board has made recommendations, ensuring that the Queensland position is presented through the Electrical Safety Office.

Committees

The Electrical Licensing Committee establishes and safeguards appropriate standards of performance for providers of electrical services.

The committee met nine times during the year and held 13 disciplinary hearings (involving seven electrical workers and six electrical contractors) as a result of non-compliant electrical work. Disciplinary action was implemented in 11 of these cases. The committee also considered 23 applications for review of electrical licensing decisions where the Chief Executive considered the applications did not meet the eligibility criteria and the applications

were refused. The committee confirmed all original decisions of the Chief Executive.

The committee also provided advice on:

- eligibility requirements for electrical mechanic work licences and recommended that applicants hold an electrical mechanic qualification as a prerequisite
- requirements for electrical line workers to achieve competence and licence eligibility for disconnection and reconnection of whole current energy metering and for experienced refrigeration industry workers to achieve requisite qualification and electrical work licence for refrigeration and air conditioning work
- updating the skills maintenance program for electrical workers to ensure it aligns with the new Wiring Rules.

The **Electrical Safety Education Committee** is responsible for providing advice and making recommendations to the board about the promotion of electrical safety in workplaces and in the broader community. The committee met four times during the year.

The committee:

- provided advice to support the development of education and awareness initiatives linked to the *Electrical Safety Plan* and regulatory changes such as mandating the installation of safety switches in rental accommodation
- contributed to the planning of electrical safety awareness through displays at events such as Work Safe Week and Farmfest 2008
- continued to liaise with stakeholders, particularly Energex and Ergon Energy to develop a cooperative approach to promoting electrical safety
- assisted the Electrical Safety Office in providing articles for the Electrical Safety Office's new newsletter "Electrical Safety Outlook".

The **Electrical Equipment Committee** provides advice and makes recommendations to the board about the safety, energy efficiency and performance of electrical appliances and equipment. The committee met four times during the year.

The committee:

- monitored problems revealed in field reported incidents relating to the safety of appliances and equipment

- monitored the effectiveness of product recalls associated with manufacturers recalling appliances and equipment
- monitored investigations of fires suspected of having electrical origin and recommended corrective actions
- recommended appropriate amendments to Australian Standards so that appliances and equipment are manufactured and tested to eliminate electrical safety concerns
- provided advice into the national Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council Equipment Safety Regime review.

During the year, the committee noted continuing incidents of fires in combination bathroom light, fan, heater assemblies and provided advice about possible action. The committee noted the success of the state and territory regulators to influence change to the relevant standard to require only ceramic heat lamp holders to be used.