Cleaning industry - Electrical safety

Why do I need to be worried about electrical safety?

Electrical equipment is widely used in the cleaning industry. Frequent use and cleaning may cause equipment to become electrically unsafe. Electricity can kill if you give it the chance. Even non-fatal shocks can lead to severe and permanent injuries which may include burns, eye damage, partial loss of limb function, neurological problems such as memory loss and confusion, and injuries caused after the shock (e.g. falling from a ladder or contacting moving machinery).

Direct contact with electricity is not the only issue to be aware of. Electrical equipment can also cause fires or even explosions that can injure or kill people and cause damage to equipment and buildings.

What should I do to stop this happening?

There are a number of things that can be done to limit the risk of injury or property damage from electricity in the cleaning industry. Installing a safety switch is one of the best ways to guard against an electrical tragedy. Additionally, **always** make sure that:

- you never attempt to do your own electrical work – it's dangerous, illegal and can be fatal. Illegal electrical work may also result in an insurer refusing to accept a claim. Always get a licensed electrician to do any electrical work
- all areas have enough power points to avoid the use of double adaptors and extension leads

Note: the use of power boards is preferred to double adaptors.

- you know what equipment is covered by any safety switch
- you use electrical appliances designed for use in this type of environment (e.g. splash-proof or waterproof)
- you turn off power to electrical equipment that is not designed for the environment if the area around the equipment becomes wet
- electrical equipment is regularly inspected to make sure it has not been damaged (this may also improve productivity by reducing the downtime of equipment)
- electrical equipment (e.g. vacuum cleaners, extension leads, etc.) and electrical installations (e.g. switchboards, safety switches, wiring, etc.) are regularly serviced and maintained
- if you remove any covers that may expose electrical parts during cleaning or servicing, make sure they are replaced before the equipment is turned back on (e.g. covers on machines etc)
- people report faulty electrical equipment (e.g. when cords are frayed or bare wires are exposed, smoke is coming out of the equipment or the equipment cuts out for no obvious reason)
- you remove faulty electrical equipment immediately from service and attach a warning label to it. You should make sure that the equipment cannot be not used again until it has been inspected/repaired by a licensed electrician

- extension cords and electrical leads are located where they won't suffer physical damage (e.g. keep them away from water, chemicals, hot surfaces, walkways or any other place where they can be easily damaged. If leads need to be in areas where they might suffer damage, make sure they are protected from physical damage
- consider using childproof plastic plug covers (particularly for power points that could be accessed by the public)
- workers wear appropriate footwear
- workers are trained about working with electricity. The training should cover topics such as:
  - correct ways to use electrical equipment
  - function of controls and guards
  - procedures to isolate electrical equipment before cleaning
  - cleaning near power outlets and electrical equipment (e.g. fluids should not be allowed to enter the power outlets or electrical equipment)
  - first aid for electrical burns.

There are also legal requirements about when you need to have a safety switch and when you need to have it and any *specified electrical equipment* inspected and tested.

These requirements vary depending on the type of work being performed in different areas of the workplace. The types of work done in the cleaning industry are likely to be service work and office work. Some examples of *specified electrical equipment* requiring inspection, testing and tagging, which may be used in the cleaning industry include carpet shampoo machines, floor polishers, vacuum cleaners, extension leads, etc.

The attached table provides guidance on safety switch and inspection and test requirements to help you meet your electrical safety obligations.

For more information visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or call 1300 650 662 for electrical safety matters or 1300 369 915 for workplace health and safety matters.

Guide to inspection and test requirements – Cleaning industry			
	Specified Electrical Equipment must be inspected, tested and tagged:	A **Fixed safety switch** must be tested in accordance with AS/NZS 3760:	A **portable safety switch** must be tested in accordance with AS/NZS 3760:
When used for	• at least once every 12 months by a *competent person*; **OR** • connected to a safety switch.	• tested immediately after it is connected by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*; **AND** • at least once every six months by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every 12 months[1] by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*.	• tested immediately after it is connected by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every three months by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every 12 months[1] by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*.
When used for	• at least once every five years by a *competent person*; **OR** • connected to a safety switch.	• tested immediately after it is connected by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*; **AND** • at least once every six months by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every 12 months[1] by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*.	• tested immediately after it is connected by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every three months by the user (push-button test only); **AND** • at least once every 12 months[1] by a licensed electrician or a *competent person*.

Notes:

1. If the safety switch protects electrical equipment that is NOT in an environment where the supply cord is subject to flexing during normal use, and is NOT open to abuse, and is NOT in a hostile environment, then **the test interval is at least once every two years**, instead of 12 months.

- Records of all tests performed on safety switches and electrical equipment should be made and kept.
- Consider testing safety switches outside normal trading hours, because when a safety switch is tested, the power to all equipment connected through it will be turned off.
- If a safety switch does not trip immediately when the test button is pushed, it may be faulty. You should immediately turn the suspected faulty safety switch off, attach a warning tag and make sure the safety switch is NOT used until it has been inspected by a licensed electrician (this includes fixed safety switches).
- ***Competent person*** means a person who has acquired, through training, qualifications, experience or a combination of these, the knowledge and skill enabling the person to inspect and test electrical equipment.
- ***Specified electrical equipment*** includes extension leads, portable outlet devices (e.g. power boards) and plug-in electrical equipment that is **moved** during its normal use for the purpose of its use (other than a portable safety switch).