Electrical safety is everybody's business

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The impact of unsafe electrical equipment, fittings or wiring in a work situation can prove to be fatal. This is especially the case if your electrical circuits do not have safety switches installed (the technical term is *Residual Current Devices*). It's quite a common situation in older properties around the state to not have RCDs as there is not a requirement to have them (and it's not retrospective), except in new or renovated buildings.

Electrocution does happen in workplaces around Australia each year. It's in everyone's interests to make sure any electrical risks are identified and neutralised. Let's face it; nobody wants their staff to be placed in a situation where they are in any potential danger. However, in my travels in and around hotels I see electrical issues back-of-house that continue to shock me….

There are a number of ways that we can address this issue. Firstly, it's just common sense that if any electrical equipment has a cord that's frayed, perished or damaged you should fix it or replace it. If any power point has a face plate broken it should be repaired forthwith. If there's any electrical wires exposed an electrician should be utilised to repair the problem. It is illegal to conduct electrical work yourself unless you are qualified. How would you know the circuit is live or not?

The *Electrical Safety Act 2002* says that an employer has an obligation to ensure that all electrical equipment used in the conduct of the person's business or undertaking is electrically safe. That could mean you need to have your electrical equipment inspected and 'tested and tagged'. You may have heard of this term before. It basically means that an electrician inspects your electrical equipment to ensure its safe. Actually, it's not only an electrician but could be a 'competent person'; that's someone who has successfully undertaken an electrical 'testing and tagging' course.

It's only relevant to certain electrical equipment and everyone doesn't have to do it. Testing and tagging is applicable in a hotel situation if the electrical circuits do not have safety switches installed. So, if all your electrical circuits had safety switches you are not required to have your gear inspected. However, if only some of them are, or none at all, you will need an inspection.

The inspection is a routine and repetitive exercise. In the service industry an inspection of your portable electrical equipment is required annually. The safety switches themselves (called type 1 and type 2) need testing on a six monthly basis. Keep a maintenance record of your inspections.

Electrical equipment needing to be tested and tagged are essentially devices that use a flexible cord for the power supply and are moved during its normal use. So, portable equipment such as hair dryers, kitchen mixers, electric knives, vacuum cleaners, power saws etc fall in this category as do power boards and extension leads. Gaming machines do not – they are not designed to be moved during the normal course of their use.

There are different requirements with regard to testing and tagging dependent upon the industry you work in. Construction and industrial are much more restrictive than our industry.

The days of the double adapter are also coming to a close. Again, in some industries they are illegal. I still find double adaptors being used in hotels. Get rid of them. They do not

have cut-off switches like power boards. And worse still is using double adaptors ‘piggy back’ style on another double adaptor or a power boards.

Keep your electrical power cabinets under lock and key. That way there is no temptation for anyone to interfere with your power supply. Ensure that all your circuits are accurately marked. If you don’t have safety switches it might be a good time to consider having them installed.

To summarise safe electrical practices:

- All electrical work must be completed by a suitably qualified person.
- Always switch off appliances at the power point before you pull out the plug.
- Always switch off appliances that are not in use.
- Keep your appliances in safe working order through inspection and preventative maintenance programs.
- Disconnect broken appliances and have frayed cords or broken power-points replaced.
- Use your appliance correctly. Read the instruction booklet and follows all instructions.
- Keep electrical cords off the floor to reduce the risk of damage from drag or contact with sharp objects.
- Electricity and water don’t mix. Keep electrical appliances away from water and wet areas i.e. away from bar sinks and taps.
- Do not re-close a tripped circuit breaker, or replace a blown fuse, until the cause has been found and rectified.
- Do not overload circuits and fuses by using too many appliances from the one power point.