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Changes to Gas Regulations

The *Gas Standards Regulations 1983* are an important set of statutory rules for ensuring the safety of persons using or constructing LPG or natural gas installations and appliances, including those on industrial premises.

Changes have now become necessary so the regulatory requirements for gasfitting, gas fitters and consumers' gas installations are current and effective within an increasingly diverse and competitive gas supply industry. The Hon Minister for Energy therefore authorised the Office of Energy to update the regulations.

In summary, the Regulations are proposed to be amended so that:

They specify the industry codes and standards with which consumers' gas installations and gasfitting must comply.

- There is greater confidence in the compliance of gas installations before the commencement of gas supply.
- Gasfitting authorisations clearly identify the type of work that persons are authorised to carry out and to require systems of supervision.
- The administration of gas fitter licensing is improved and accidents are reported.

The amendments to the Regulations have been drafted. The Office of Energy is currently consulting widely with industry stakeholders, outlining the changes and seeking comments. Presentations about the changes have been conducted in Perth, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Bunbury. Industry associations were also briefed.

A copy of the draft changes to the Regulations is available for persons wishing to study them in detail with a view to submitting written comments by 30 April 1998. Please telephone Megan Rowbottam on 08 9422 5200 during office hours, if you would like to have this document mailed to you.

We expect that this wide consultation will not only ensure the changes are well planned, but also assist understanding of the Regulations.

KEVAN McGILL
DEPUTY DIRECTOR ENERGY SAFETY

LPG Sale Restrictions Lifted

As from 1 January this year, the restrictions on trading in liquid petroleum gas (LPG) in the metropolitan area, prescribed under Section 56 of the *Energy Corporations (Powers) Act 1979*, were removed as part of the Government's initiatives to promote greater competition in the supply of energy.

This means that consumers are now free to buy the fuel of their choice - natural gas or LPG (or electricity). In some installations, it is possible that both gases will be used, each requiring a dedicated piping system. An example would be a gas installation using natural gas for water heating, cooking and space heating, and LPG for a pottery kiln installed in a hobby workshop.

As the gases are different, appliances designed to work on one gas need to be modified to be able to work safely on the other gas. It is important that gas fitters proposing to carry out work on existing installations, satisfy themselves which gas is being distributed, before commencing work.

This can be accomplished by tracing the pipework back from the appliance to the supply point. For natural gas, this will be the gas meter and LPG, the storage cylinder or tank. Some installations exist where LPG is supplied through a gas meter and these installations should contain a notice at the meter position indicating that the gas is LPG.

Now that some natural gas installations are utilising pressures greater than prescribed pressure, the working pressure in the installation should not be relied on to indicate that the gas is LPG. The only safe way is to trace the pipe back to the supply points.

Gas fitters are reminded that they must have a licence that covers the work they intend to carry out and, if LPG is involved, the licence must be endorsed to cover gases denser than air.

New Inspection Regimes

Prior to 1 January 1995, the *Gas Standards Act 1972* was administered by the State Energy Commission of Western Australia.

As most readers will be aware, on 1 January 1995, the Government separated the gas and electricity functions of SECWA and created two corporatised, government owned entities, AlintaGas and Western Power. This was part of a general restructuring of the WA energy sector.

The purpose of this was to make the energy supply industry more competitive and encourage private producers into the energy market whilst ensuring sufficient regulatory measures were in place to provide for the safety of gas and electricity consumers.

At the same time the regulatory functions of SECWA were transferred to the Office of Energy. However, the responsibility for safety inspection of consumers' gas installations remained with gas suppliers, this being a requirement of the *Gas Standards Act 1972*.

Following gas industry consultation during the last 18 months, a new regime for gas consumer installation inspections was introduced by the Office of Energy, for gas undertakers and pipeline licensees. This regime provides for more efficient inspection practices and relies on each gas supplier carrying out inspections to an approved plan.



Principal Engineer Gas Installations and Appliances Mel Stokes talks to gas industry representatives at a Gas Industry Presentation in Kalgoorlie

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During recent months, AlintaGas, Kleenheat Gas, Boral Energy and BOC Gases submitted their proposed Inspection Plans to the Director of Energy Safety. Following approval of these plans, the Minister for Energy authorised these plans under a provision in the Act. The changes therefore helped gas suppliers to meet their obligations in a professional manner, ensuring that consumer safety is maintained.

For gas fitters, it means that inspections of their work will be more systematically conducted than before, on a sample basis. Poorly performing gas fitters will be inspected more frequently than others. This approach mirrors that used for electrical inspections.

Handbook to Identify Capacitors Containing PCBs

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are a group of synthetic chlorinated organic compounds that have played an important part in many industrial products. They are listed as a carcinogenic substance under the 7th Schedule of the Poison Act 1964, administered by the Health Department of WA.

Environment Australia (the Commonwealth Department of Environment) recently published a handbook on how to deal with capacitors containing PCBs.

The handbook contains important information on how to remove components containing PCBs from electrical equipment and how to transport, store and dispose of PCBs.

Environment Australia encourages the widest circulation of this information throughout all organisations. The information in the handbook also serves as an important reference document for employees of organisations.

For copies of the free handbook, please contact: Environment Australia, telephone 1 800 803 772 (for single copies) or facsimile 02 6299 6040 (for multiple copies)

Energy Bulletin Survey

We are seeking feedback from readers of the Energy Bulletin on how this publication may be improved.

All readers are requested to complete the questionnaire enclosed in this edition of the Bulletin and return the completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope.

Your contributions will provide a valuable insight into how the contents or format of the Bulletin may be improved to better meet your needs.

National Electrical Licensing Forum "Advancing Uniformity"

On 24 and 25 February 1998, the Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council (ERAC) convened an important forum on future directions for electrical licensing. The Forum was held in Brisbane and hosted jointly by the Department of Mines & Energy Electrical Safety Office and the electrical licensing boards. It was a timely meeting with useful discussions and outcomes.

The meeting was attended by key stakeholders from the electrical industry, including representatives of employer associations (electrical contracting, Metal Trades Industries Association (MTIA)), the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU), national training bodies and State electrical safety regulators (ERAC members).

Issues Covered

- Licensing review and development to date and ERAC's desire to attain greater national uniformity, while at the same time making sure all areas of licensing can be justified on safety grounds;
- A case study of WA's approach to electrical licensing development, which included an outline of the issues currently needing to be progressed in WA;
- A summary by representatives of each of the various States/Territories, outlining their current status on licensing and related development needs;

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- Presentations from electrical contracting employers ECA Qld and National
- Electrical Contractors Association, giving their perspective on the need for future directions in electrical licensing; and
- The views of the trainers, the National Utilities and Electrotechnology Industries Training Advisory Board (NUEITAB), Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services (MERS) ITAB and NSW TAFE Commission on licensing related issues.

Discussion sessions were also held, on specific issues to be resolved with respect to:

- Electrical contractor licensing;
- Restricted electrical licensing;
- Electrical mechanic licensing and the work of trades assistants; and
- The work of linespersons, cable jointers and electrical fitters (who are licensed only by a minority of jurisdictions).

Forum Conclusions

- The licensing of persons on safety grounds is a benefit to the community and the industry;
- There are differences in the licensing arrangements of the various States and these should be overcome in the interests of business efficiency and flexibility, as well as workforce mobility;
- A national reference group comprising all key stakeholder organisations should be set up to continue electrical licensing development, with the objective of achieving, where possible, consensus on ways of resolving the national uniformity issues within 12 months, recognising that Governments would need some further time after that to implement any approved changes (some of which would undoubtedly involve changes to legislation); and
- The Australian NZ Minerals & Energy Council (ANZMEC) of Ministers would be kept briefed on these developments and progress, with a view to having their support for this initiative.

ERAC will now be organising the establishment of the National Reference Group. Readers of the Bulletin will be kept informed as this work progresses during the coming months.

The WA Perspective

In WA, the main industry issue that needs to be resolved is that of ceasing electrical fitter licensing at A grade level.

As advised to industry some 3 years ago, the WA Electrical Licensing Board now encourages persons wanting to specialise in electrical fitting to stream their training in such a way that they also qualify for an A grade electrical mechanic's licence. The present training regimes allow that to happen.

In keeping with that earlier advice to industry, the Office of Energy's intention in the near future is to recommend changes to the regulations so that:

- existing A grade electrical fitter licences are preserved and holders can continue to do electrical fitting work (but not general fixed wiring work) as at present;
- anyone that is newly trained in electrical fitting work but doesn't (because of the content of their training) qualify for an A grade electrical mechanic's licence, or pass a comprehensive competency assessment (optional), will be issued with a Restricted Electrical Licence to allow the holder to disconnect/reconnect electrical equipment to 650v and carry out related activities.

At this time there are actually few A grade Electrical Fitter licensed only persons left in industry, since most converted to get the mechanic licence endorsement some 3 years ago, based on the earlier advice and opportunity provided - so these proposed changes should have very little impact but have the substantial benefit of aligning WA with the other States.

Some of these issues will be discussed and monitored at the proposed National Reference Group and all the indications are that WA's intentions will be mirrored by the minority of other States that currently still license electrical fitters at A grade level.

For enquiries on articles in this Energy Bulletin, please contact Harry Hills, Office of Energy:

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