

House wiring standards shocking

Xolile Bhengu

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New home owners might be in for a shock — literally.

A shortage of qualified electricians is leading to dangerously low safety standards, the body responsible for wiring certification warns.

“People never think that there could be faults in a new house.”

Peter Smuts, general manager of the Western Cape Approved Electrical Inspection Authority, said fraudulent certificates of compliance have become a problem.

Though no one may sell a property without a valid compliance certificate, policing this falls to the department of labour, which does not have the resources to enforce the rules.

Smuts said:

“We are not saying that all certificates are fraudulent, but the tragedy is that people never think that there could be electrical faults in a new house. It’s always almost an afterthought for people to check this.”

Smuts said the inspection authority’s eight national branches are inundated with complaints.

He said: “Too many of the certificates have been found to have been approved without the person physically checking on site for faults.”

Smuts said most of the complaints were from new property owners. He said the property boom made the situation worse.

“People are not aware of their rights on the issue of electrical installations and where they can go when they have a problem.

“This is especially true for the emerging market. If you don’t take note of an electrical fault and someone gets injured on your property, you can be held responsible.”

The Western Cape Approved Electrical Inspection Authority said that all electrical installations must be done by a professional and homeowners should ask for the electrician’s ID card, which should carry a mark of approval from the department of labour.

This would be proof that the electrician was registered.

Smuts said: “The public must send their complaints to the department in writing.”

For more information, visit the electrical inspection authority at www.wcaeia.co.za or the labour department at www.labour.gov.za.

Tips for electrical installations

Exposed wiring is a hazard: all wires must be hidden.

Don't ignore nuisance tripping, it is a hint of a possible fault in the wiring and must be checked.

You must have an original Certificate of Compliance (COC) form and all the pages must be filled in.

Make sure the certificate lists all the details and contacts of the contractor who installed your circuitry.

Make sure that the person who approved the certificate has written a site inspection report.

The certificate must be handed to you before you take occupation.

Keep the COC form in a safe place because you will need it when you sell your property.

If you are not sure that the installation is satisfactory, get a second opinion.

Submit a written complaint about faulty wiring to the labour department's chief inspector of occupational health and safety.