

# OUR KEY POLICIES IN SCOTLAND

[www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/scotland](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/scotland)

# Electricity **can** and **does** kill

**Electricity causes over two thirds of all house fires in Scotland each year.<sup>1</sup> We estimate that electrical-related house fires cost the Scottish economy £35 million in 2019.<sup>2</sup> However the personal cost is incalculable and, not surprisingly, older and vulnerable people are most at risk.**

Electrical Safety First is the consumer safety charity dedicated to reducing the number of deaths, injuries and accidents caused by electricity. We do this by campaigning on behalf of consumers and electrical trade professionals to improve safety regulation and make sure messages are appropriate, up-to-date and well communicated.

IN 2019, WE ESTIMATE  
THAT ELECTRICAL-RELATED  
HOUSE FIRES COST THE  
SCOTTISH ECONOMY

**£35 million**

1. Electrical Safety First methodology of fire statistics provided by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the 2019-20 period.

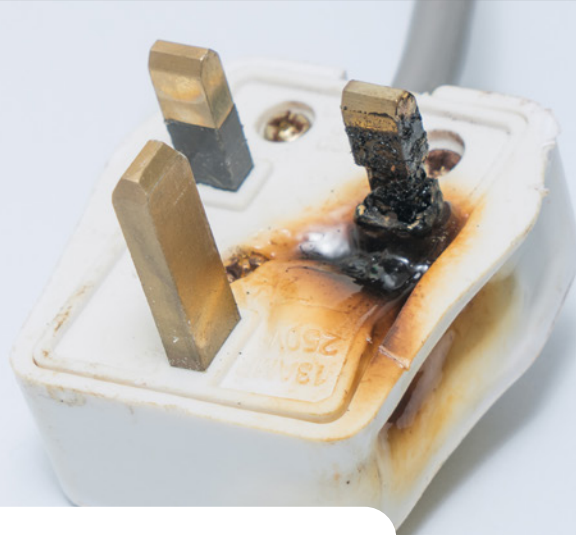
2. There were 3,429 electrical-related house fires in 2019. 572 resulted in a death or injury. Based on the economic costs of a house fire of £7,300 and £24,900 where an injury or death was recorded, derived from this UK Government report: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121105004822/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/144524.pdf>, we calculate:  $2,857 \times £7,300 + 572 \times £24,900 = £35,098,900$ .



# Our policies at a glance



- 1.** A cross-government plan for electrical safety, allowing shared intelligence to create an improved evidence base, ensuring better targeting of resources to help protect the most vulnerable.
- 2.** A common standard for electrical safety in all homes so that everyone, regardless of tenure, has equal protection from electrical risk.
- 3.** Safeguards to protect consumers from the rising tide of dangerous, sub-standard and counterfeit electrical products.
- 4.** Measures to ensure the safety of domestic electrical installations, including easy-to-access routes to find registered electricians.
- 5.** A clear focus on the future challenges for electrical safety, from the decarbonisation of energy in housing to the mainstreaming of electric vehicles.



## A CROSS-GOVERNMENT PLAN FOR ELECTRICAL SAFETY

During 2019-20 there were seven house fires a day caused by an electrical source in Scotland – 2,657 in total, accounting for 68% of all dwelling fires.<sup>3</sup> This percentage has remained at similar levels over the last five years whilst the overall number of domestic fires has slowly fallen. We are also concerned about increasing fire risks from new products such as mobile phone, e-cigarette and electric vehicle chargers, which the current recording system does not capture.

Older and vulnerable people can be most at risk of fire because they often live in old or poor quality housing which contains faulty electrics, they are likely to own older appliances and/or are unable to afford essential electrical repairs. These risks are heightened by conditions such as dementia and other degenerative syndromes.

DURING 2019-20 THERE WERE SEVEN HOUSE FIRES A DAY CAUSED BY AN ELECTRICAL SOURCE IN SCOTLAND

# 2,657

IN TOTAL

3. Electrical Safety First methodology of fire statistics provided by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for the 2019-20 period



### WE NEED:

- € A cross-government plan to reduce the number of electrical house fires, ensuring better targeting of resources for the most vulnerable.
- € A more up-to-date Incident Recording System (IRS) that allows for better recording of fires caused by modern technology.



## A COMMON STANDARD FOR ELECTRICAL SAFETY IN ALL HOMES

Despite electricity being the number one cause of Scotland's domestic fires, housing legislation and standards are subject to a 'tenure lottery' with different levels of protection for different tenures. All electrical installations deteriorate with age and use. They need to be inspected and tested at regular intervals to check whether they are in a satisfactory condition for continued use.

There are now protections for tenants in both the private and social rented sectors. However, the owner-occupied sector is lagging behind, despite accounting for the majority of Scotland's housing (60% in total) and being home to most older people (62%).<sup>4</sup> 43% of Scottish homeowners either have never had an electrical inspection or don't know if their property has ever been checked by an electrician.<sup>5</sup> There are also risks associated with the divergent safety regimes for mixed-tenure housing blocks, with nearly half (47%) of electrical dwelling fires in 2019 occurring in flats or tenements.<sup>6</sup>



### WE NEED:

- € A common electrical safety standard for all homes implemented during the lifetime of the 6th Scottish Parliament
- € Mandatory, five-yearly electrical safety checks across all tenures.

4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-2018-key-findings/>

5. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2075 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 8th- 14th June 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Scotland adults (aged 18+).

6. Electrical Safety First methodology of fire data provided by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2020.



## CONSUMER SAFEGUARDS FOR UNSAFE PRODUCTS

Electrical products cause the majority of house fires in Scotland, accounting for around 80% each year.<sup>7</sup> While user misuse is a key factor, there are an increasing number of issues which could be tackled with early policy intervention.

Product recalls are an ongoing concern, with our research showing most achieving just a 10-20% success rate.<sup>8</sup> We found that only a third of Scottish consumers register their electrical appliances.<sup>9</sup> There are also increasing concerns with white goods, which caused a house fire almost every day in Scotland during 2019.<sup>10</sup>

Our research has also indicated a particular problem with the sale of counterfeit and sub-standard electrical items online, with one in five Scottish residents (one million people) having purchased a fake electrical product that was advertised as genuine within the last twelve months.



### WE NEED:

- € An inquiry on the safety of electrical products and harm caused to consumers.
- € Opportunities to be identified across all government areas to introduce measures to both promote and/or require the registration of electrical products.

7. Electrical Safety First methodology of fire data provided by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2020.  
8. <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/1259/product-recall-report-2014.pdf>  
9. YouGov survey of 2102 people, representative of the UK population, carried out in January 2020.  
10. <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/news-campaigns/news.aspx?page=1&tags=prevention&year=2020&month=0>





## MEASURES TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS

Sub-standard electrical work and failings in workmanship can and do result in death, injury and loss of property through fire. However, the benefits of using a registered electrician for electrical work and repairs are not understood by many consumers. Registered electricians are insured, so you are protected if anything goes wrong. Their work is also regularly assessed and they work to the BS7671 safety standard, as well as being regulated by government, which provides consumers with further peace of mind. At present there are a number of avenues for consumers to seek help to find competent and qualified individual electricians and businesses, but there is no comprehensive register, and there is low recognition among consumers for the multiple databases that do exist.



### WE NEED:

- ③ Creation of a single register to make it easier for consumers to identify registered electricians, supported by a long-term awareness campaign.



# A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR ELECTRICAL SAFETY

## The Decarbonisation Agenda

As part of Scotland's contribution to tackling climate change and meeting its target for 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, the way we heat our homes needs to change. The draft Heat in Buildings Strategy sets out actions and proposals for transforming our homes and the systems that supply their heat, ensuring all buildings reach zero emissions by 2045. It recognises the role of electricity in heating people's homes through the use of technologies such as heat pumps and heat networks, but the regulatory proposals have not assessed the preparedness of domestic electrical systems. Whilst new build homes can and must plan for the electrification of heat, existing housing stock will prove a bigger challenge, particularly older housing which is more likely to contain outdated electrical systems. This could create an unintended consequence of the policy and additional financial implications for homeowners.

The huge increase in electrical appliances, such as electric boilers and heat pumps, together with a shortage of trained installers and a lack of familiarity with electrical heating, will impact on electrical safety.



## WE NEED:

- Ⓔ A national study to look at the physical condition and preparedness of Scotland's domestic electrical installations for future demands.
- Ⓔ Policymakers must include electrical safety as a key factor in its policymaking towards achieving net zero homes.





## A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR ELECTRICAL SAFETY

### E-Transport

As we transition to Electric Vehicles (EVs), our research has found issues with drivers charging their vehicles dangerously due to a lack of public infrastructure and appropriately installed domestic charging facilities. Our worry is that the EV roll-out could by-pass many drivers, particularly those living in high density housing areas, renting or residing in flats and tenements, where there are extra barriers and challenges to accessing safe charging points. New build homes can and must plan for the electrification of transport, however, existing homes will prove more difficult to adapt. We estimate around 60% of people in Scotland live in housing that may limit their ability to access EV charging points.<sup>11</sup>



### WE NEED:

- Ⓜ A change to the Building Regulations to require all new-build homes with a dedicated car parking space to be fitted with an EV charging point.
- Ⓜ A focus on delivering a mix of charging options for residents without private parking, such as retro-fitting street lamps and creating 'Charging Hubs' in communities, to allow drivers to conveniently charge their vehicles close to home.
- Ⓜ Amend the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004 to allow a tenant or co-owner to install a charging point more easily.
- Ⓜ Update the Scottish secure tenancy agreement in liaison with landlords to make it simpler for tenants to install EV charging points.

11. Derived from the Scottish House Condition Survey 2019 which states that terraced (21%), tenement (24% and other flats (13%) accounted for 58% of dwellings in Scotland. These are the types of properties which are less likely to have off-street parking options unless dedicated parking facilities are offered.

# Get in touch

- ✉ To discuss our policy work in Scotland, please contact:

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If you are an MSP or work for one, we have a portal which provides a range of resources to assist you with your parliamentary and constituency work. Please visit:  
[www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/MSPs](http://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/MSPs)

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**Electrical  
Safety First**   
The UK's electrical safety experts