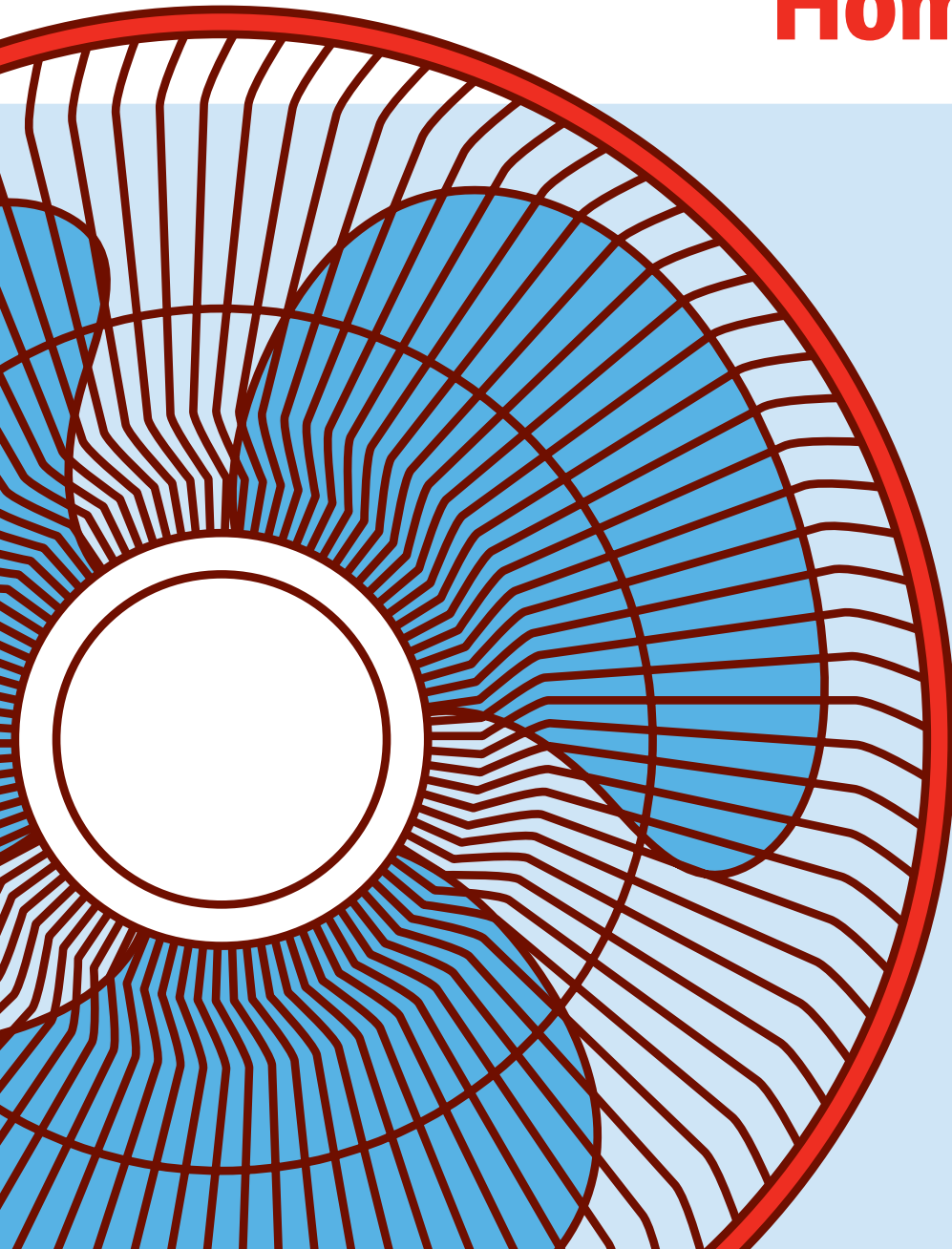


Electrical Safety First

The UK's electrical safety experts

Policy paper

Home Safety



1. Background

Electrical Safety First is the UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by electrical accidents. As many of these accidents take place within the home, safety in dwellings – particularly the private rented sector – is a core concern. Poorly maintained homes often have poorly maintained (and therefore dangerous) electrical installations, which can have fatal consequences.

- According to government statistics over half of all accidental fires in UK homes (more than 20,000 annually) are caused by electricity. Each year about 70 people die and 350,000 receive a serious injury – which, in addition to skin burns, can also include temporary blindness, severe pain and difficulty breathing – from an electrical accident in the home.¹
- Independent research suggests that Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants are more likely to be at risk of electric shock than, for example, council tenants or home-owners.²
- Government figures also recorded 21% of the private rented sector as having class 1 hazards – the most dangerous risk to health and safety in dwellings under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.³
- Presumably this problem will increase as the sector grows and, in the last five years, the number of households renting privately has soared to more than 3.6 million or one in six households.⁴

1. Electrical Safety First Core dataset. Definitions of 'serious injury' obtained via the South West Public Health Observatory.

2. Research conducted by Ipsos MORI. 25th June-2nd July 2010.

3. English Housing Survey 2011, Department for Communities and Local Government

4. Data supplied by Shelter March 2012.

2. Electrical Safety First objectives

Electrical Safety First has identified three key changes which could help improve conditions for tenants and assist landlords to engage in best practice.

These are:

- A mandatory, five yearly check of electrical installations by a competent person.
- Residual Current Devices (RCDs) installed in the consumer unit (fusebox) in all rented properties and on all appliances supplied by landlords. An RCD is a life-saving device which is designed to prevent you from getting a fatal electric shock if you touch something live, such as a bare wire. It provides a level of protection that ordinary fuses or circuit-breakers cannot provide.
- The provision of appropriate guidance on the inspection and testing of electrical appliances provided in rented accommodation. To ensure the safety of appliances supplied with a property, we suggest they undergo Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) at least every five years.

3. Electrical Safety First policy proposals

Electrical Safety First believes improving UK housing standards can be undertaken without creating an unnecessary regulatory burden. Through our responses to (UK and devolved government) consultations, we have offered proposals for improving electrical safety in the home, which combine good business sense with enhanced consumer safety.

England

The Government recently announced its amendments to Part P of the Building Regulations for England. It was introduced in 2005, in order to reduce injuries and fatalities caused by electric shocks and fires and to improve the

quality of home installations. Part P is the only legal framework in England which protects the consumer from unsafe electrical work in the home – and curtails the number of 'cowboy' electricians working on domestic installations.

There have been two primary changes to Part P. Firstly, under the revised regulations, electrical work undertaken in kitchens or outdoors is no longer notifiable unless a new circuit is required. The second major change will allow the use of a registered third party to certify notifiable work, as an alternative to using a building control body. (Previously, a contractor undertaking work covered by Part P – but who was not registered with a competent persons' scheme – had to notify the local authority's building control, who would determine if the work conformed to the regulation).

Electrical Safety First is concerned by the reduction in notifiable work, as both statistical data and anecdotal evidence indicate that kitchens and outdoors are high risk areas requiring a high standard of electrical work. However, we do in principle support registered third parties certifying notifiable work, as this will reduce time, costs and inconvenience to both the consumer and the contractor. Nevertheless, it must be properly enforced and the public must be made fully aware of Part P and its requirements. Part P will be reviewed again in two years and we hope the Government will gather evidence on any safety implications of these new amendments.

Scotland

The Scottish Parliament has been developing a housing strategy and Electrical Safety First has responded to a number of consultations on this issue. This has included arguing that PRS properties should have the same standards of safety as social housing – and that the repairing standard be more explicit about the required condition of electrical installations and appliances. We also strongly recommended that the proposed Tenant Information Pack (TIP) provides information about the age, condition and last inspection of the electrical installation and appliances

of privately rented properties. Although some information about landlord responsibilities for electrical installations has been included in the final version, certification for electrical installations will not be incorporated in TIPs. We will continue to lobby on their inclusion.

Electrical Safety First has also recommended that the Scottish Government's checklist for maintaining a quality home includes a reference to safety – electrical or otherwise. And we supported the suggestion that local authorities automatically issue maintenance orders on any property which has had a work notice (i.e. a demand for work or repair to the property). The maintenance order allows a Local Authority to put their own plan into action and charge the cost of works to the owners.

Wales

The Welsh Housing White Paper (*Homes for Wales, May 2012*) aimed to increase the housing supply and improve the quality of existing homes in Wales. While Electrical Safety First regretted its lack of specific reference to electrical safety, we applauded its plans for a mandatory PRS registration and licensing scheme. However, we believe that the scheme should consider the condition of the property, as well as the suitability of the landlord. We have also supported proposals for mandatory training courses for landlords and requested that an electrical safety module be included.

Electrical Safety First has encouraged the Welsh Government to consider developing a simple, standard document detailing landlord and tenant responsibilities and suggested they establish a TIP – similar to the mandatory version being launched in Scotland next year. We have also asked the Welsh Government to extend its Housing Quality Standard to the PRS. The standard currently requires all social landlords to improve their housing stock to an acceptable level by 2012 or by agreement with Welsh Ministers. Following on from the White Paper, a Housing Bill is due to be tabled in the Welsh Assembly in the autumn of 2013.

It should also be noted that Part P is still in effect in Wales. The recent amendments to the regulation apply to England only.

4. Electrical Safety First supporting activities

Electrical Safety First has already undertaken a number of actions to help improve electrical safety in the home. These include:

- Establishing an Industry Summit, to bring together a range of stakeholders to discuss consumer safety and the changing industry landscape, particularly the amendments to Part P. A White Paper was developed from this event, which has been submitted to relevant government departments and key stakeholders.
- Initiating a public affairs and media campaign to support Part P – the only legal framework in England which protects the consumer from unsafe electrical work in the home. As a consequence, Part P has been retained but amended, with changes taking effect in April 2013.
- Liaising with the Department for Communities and Local Government to explore ways of promoting and increasing awareness of Part P.
- Launching a home safety check app for smartphones, to help identify electrical hazards in the home. While the app can be used by anyone, the accompanying media campaign encouraged renters in particular to use the app, and landlords to carry out a visual inspection on change of tenancy. In its first year alone, the app was downloaded by over 30,000 people.
- Creating a high-profile campaign around recalled products and producing an easy-to-use online tool that allows people to check if they own an electrical product that has been recalled.
- Running a range of campaigns – across all media channels – to increase awareness of the need for electrical safety. For example, the 'Hooky Goods' campaign – which promoted awareness of the danger of fake electrical goods – gained coverage on national TV, press and radio, including The Sun, BBC Radio 4's You and Yours and BBC TV's Breakfast.
- Producing The Landlord's Guide to Electrical Safety, a new, short guide designed to help landlords meet their legal obligations. Our 'Home Truths' campaign also focused on raising landlords' awareness of their responsibilities around electrical safety in their rented properties.
- Working with the Government's Fire Kills campaign and Fire and Rescue Services to promote Electrical Fire Safety Week. A range of events throughout the UK helped people identify simple things they can do to make their homes – and families – safer.
- Continuing grassroots support and engagement is provided through our Fire Safety Grants and Home Improvement Grant Scheme. The former funds a range of community-based electrical fire-safety activities, while the latter helps ensure vulnerable groups are supported in their own homes by ensuring their electrical safety.
- Establishing a new industry-standard reporting format, and associated classification codes, for Installation condition reporting. The Electrical Safety First Best Practice Guide No 4 on electrical installation condition reporting has also been incorporated into the EAL syllabus (EAL is the awarding body for engineering, manufacturing, building services and related sectors).

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Electrical Safety First is the UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by electrical accidents. Our aim is to ensure everyone in the UK can use electricity safely.

electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

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