



Electrical safety in the construction industry

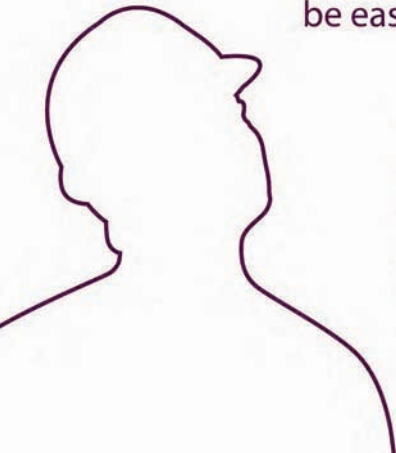
A short guide on working safely with and around electricity on construction sites

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The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and other organisations are concerned that many workers do not work safely with and around electricity on construction sites. Not following safe working procedures causes a number of deaths, serious injuries and accidents to workers each year, but they can be easily avoided.

The HSE recommends that electrical contractors, main contractors and their subcontractors use the information in this leaflet and the 'Guidance on Safe Isolation Procedures' leaflet (see 'More information' for details).



Electrical contractors

Experience shows that electricians are particularly at risk of death or serious injury from electric shock or burns if they fail to follow safe working procedures. It is therefore important to comply with all health and safety laws, in particular the ones to do with working safely. Organisations in the construction industry are trying to raise awareness of the main safety messages for electrical contractors.

Electrical contractors should not allow dangerous work practices, such as working with live electricity or switching electricity on before they have finished their work and everything has been installed correctly.

It is never absolutely safe to work on or near live electrical equipment. But sometimes electrical contractors agree to switch the electricity on before they have finished their work, to make the jobs of designers, commissioning engineers, clients, main contractors or people in the finishing trades easier. By doing this, except in some very specific circumstances where they have taken steps to prevent themselves and others getting injured, they are breaking the law.



Main contractors and subcontractors

Main contractors and their non-electrical subcontractors should be aware that they also have legal responsibilities under the Electricity at Work Regulations (made under The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974), in particular Regulation 14.

Regulation 14 requires that no work is done on or near live circuits where there is a risk of touching live conductors, unless

- the work cannot be done if the electricity is switched off, and
- it is reasonable to work on or near the live conductors, and
- suitable steps have been taken to prevent the person doing the work and others from getting injured.

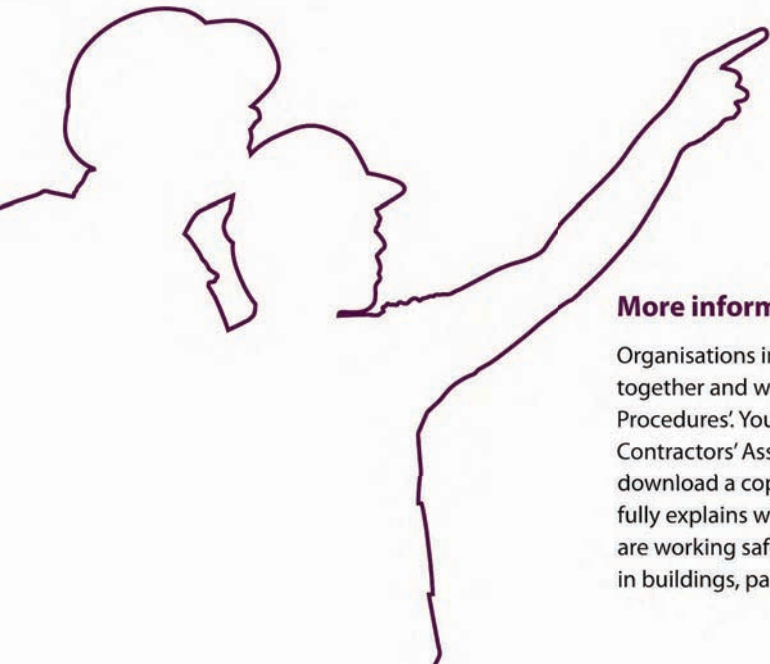
All workers, supervisors and managers on construction sites should be made aware that, in law, it is not considered reasonable to work on or near live conductors solely on the grounds of convenience, or of saving time or cost.

Electrical contractors should not switch on the electricity before they have finished their work unless:

- they have a written request from the main contractor or the main contractor's agent, and
- the circuits have been fully inspected, tested and are safe to use, and
- the electrical contractor agrees it is safe to do so.

When the electricity is switched on following the above process, the main contractor is legally responsible for making sure that everyone working on site is aware of any live circuits in an area. They are also responsible for making sure that their electrical subcontractors use safe isolation procedures before working on any circuits that could possibly be live. The electrical subcontractor has the same duty and responsibility to use safe isolation practices when required.





More information

Organisations in the electrical industry and the HSE have worked together and written a guide called 'Guidance on Safe Isolation Procedures'. You can get a copy of this guide from the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA), NICEIC or SELECT. You can also download a copy from our website at www.esc.org.uk. The guide fully explains what needs to be done to make sure workers on site are working safely when working on or near live electrical systems in buildings, particularly in the final stages of construction.



The Electrical Safety Council

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The Electrical Safety Council is an independent charity committed to reducing deaths and injuries through electrical accidents at home and at work.

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