

21 November 2013

Australian Trade Commission
GPO Box 5301
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Re: Electrical Contractor Safety Program Guide

Dear Sir/Madam,

Master Electricians Australia is grateful for the opportunity to comment on Austrade's release of the Electrical Contractor Safety Program Guide.

Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is dynamic and modern trade association representing Electrical Contractors. Originating as the Electrical Contractors Association in 1937, we are the leading voice of the electrical and communications industry throughout Australia. The organisation's website is: <http://www.masterelectricians.com.au>

MEA views the release of this guide as a positive step forward in terms of electrical safety. However, we have identified some issues of concern that we believe need to be actioned. The points we wish to raise are detailed below.

References to Electrician and Contractor

To ensure an accurate understanding of respective duties, it is recommended that reference to Electrician under the "*Responsibilities for best practice model*" be changed to Electrical Contractor and reference to Contractor be amended to Principal Contractor. The primary Work Health and Safety duty rests with the Employer/Electrical Contractor. Electricians follow the standards and procedures set down by their employer and it is the Electrical Contractor, not the Electrician, who is contracted to do the work. The same applies between a Contractor/Subcontractor to Principal Contractor. Principal duties are placed on the Principal Contractor as opposed to the Contractor/Subcontractor. For these reasons, the responsibilities in the Guide should refer to Electrical Contractors and Principal Contractors, where each applies.

Reference to electrical safety legislation

Under "*Applying responsibilities to the procurement model*" the Guide references the requirement to have knowledge of Work Health and Safety legislation. While this is undoubtedly necessary, given the need for compliance with electrical safety legislation on a worksite, it is important that the Guide also include reference to electrical safety laws.

Requiring an understanding AS/NZ 3000 or AS/NZS 3017

Also under "*Applying responsibilities to the procurement model*", the Guide directs those engaging an Electrical Contractor to have an understanding of AS/NZ 3000 and AS/NZS 3017. MEA is concerned that without formal electrical trade training, it is too much of a risk for those without the appropriate electrical licence to attempt to interpret the substance behind the wiring

rules or how to interpret specific issues such as electrical test figures and know whether they are appropriate or not. The focus of this section should instead be on ensuring an Electrical Contractor provides certification for safety of the installation, supported by appropriate procedures and testing.

Part payment after certificate of completion

At *Step 7: Contract Completion*, the Guide advises that, unless an electrician can provide '*Certificates of Electrical Compliance*' for completed work, payment should be withheld. Restricting part payment for Electrical Contractors in this way is likely to have a significant impact on the cash flow of a business, particularly smaller operators.

Only requiring payment after formal completion may be acceptable for small contract jobs such as domestic work, however for major works this is not practical. On these larger projects, energising equipment or even supply may not occur until months or years into the works, meaning that a *Certificate of Electrical Compliance* cannot be produced by an Electrical Contractor for a significant period after their work is completed. For these types of projects considerable costs, in the area of millions of dollars, can be associated with electrical work and supply of equipment. This is particularly problematic if the electrical work has been performed in the early stages of a larger project. Without access to a part payment many Electrical Contractors could be substantially out of pocket for the work they have performed. While Electrical Contractor payment terms in some contracts may relate to '*Mechanical Completion of a Separable Portion*' to overcome this issue, not all Electrical Contractors are aware of this option when agreeing to the terms of a contract.

It is critical that part payment remain an industry standard in contracts of this nature and this must be reflected in the Electrical Contractor Safety Program Guide.

Safe Work Method Statements

The inference in the Appendices that there be individual Safe Work Method Statements for every task is not required by Work Health and Safety legislation. Legislation only requires Safe Work Method Statements for high risk construction work as defined in the Work Health and Safety Regulations.

Missing critical Standards

MEA has identified at least three critical standards not referenced in the Guide. They are:

- (1) AS/NZS 4836 – *Safe working on or near low-voltage electrical installations and equipment*
- (2) AS/NZS 3012 – *Electrical installations – Construction and demolition sites*
- (3) AS 1674.2 – *Safety in welding and allied processes electrical*

A lack of understanding and implementation of these critical Standards is causing in the order of 50% - 80% of electrical incidents on projects. It is essential that the Guide make reference to them.

Insufficient inclusion of important safety issues

Topics such as construction wiring, welding and electrical commissioning are important safety issues that should be addressed in this Guide.

Insufficient industry consultation

In order to ensure industry is fully informed on the Guide and have access to expert advice for any clarification, it is essential that industry groups, like MEA, be referenced as a valuable source of information and advice. MEA has a wealth of highly trained and experienced technical experts on hand to provide advice on electrical safety issues as well as a range of training courses and online resources. We have been a trusted source of information and guidance for the electrical industry since our inception in 1937 and it would remiss not to inform industry of this essential resource.

Conclusion

Given the number of concerns we have raised above, it is evident that a re-assessment of the content and structure of the Guide is warranted. In order to inform a re-assessment, wider consultation must occur to ensure the Guide is fully informed by industry and reflects the needs of those who will be subject to it.

MEA would be eager to be involved in any such consultations to build and improve on the Guide.

Regards,



Malcolm Richards
CEO