

POSITION PAPER

EMERGENCY SITUATION AND LIVE ELECTRICAL WORK ON AN ELECTRICAL INSTALLATION

What is this policy about?

This position paper provides guidance to employers, electrical workers, self-employed persons, controllers of premises and key stakeholders on how WorkCover will apply the term *'emergency situation and the risk to harm'* as outlined in clause 207(4) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* (the Regulation). In addition, guidance is also provided on the safety measures that must be followed when live electrical work is carried out on the part of the electrical installation being worked on.

Background

Clause 207(2) of the OHS Regulation requires that no electrical work can be carried out while that part of the electrical installation's circuits and apparatus are energised. Generally, live electrical work cannot be justified as being as safe as working de-energised. The only variation to this requirement is where there is an emergency situation and the risk of harm would be greater if the circuits and electrical apparatus are de-energised. In this situation work can proceed, but only in accordance with a safe system of work that encompasses a list of mandatory safety measures.

Following consultation with stakeholders it is apparent some confusion exists regarding interpretation of the term an **'emergency situation'**. WorkCover's Electrical Working Group has reviewed this matter and has recommended a number of legislative changes to clause 207 of the OHS Regulation, which were approved by the Minister for Commerce in December 2003. The recommendations included clarification and expansion of the mandatory safety measures relating to live electrical work and replacement of the term *'emergency situation'* with the term ***'in the interests of safety'***.

WorkCover's policy

Until these legislative amendments are ratified by amendment of the OHS Regulation WorkCover will apply the term *'emergency situation'* to mean a situation where it is necessary ***'in the interests of safety'*** to perform the electrical work and the risk of harm would be greater if the circuits and electrical apparatus were de-energised before the electrical work commenced.

In practical terms this applies to situations where there is a significant potential for the loss of life or serious injury to persons or animals, destruction of or significant damage to property, destruction of or significant damage to the environment or the loss of the provision of essential community services that would, if the circuits and apparatus were de-energised, result in greater harm. In such situations live electrical work would be permitted if and only if all of the mandatory control measures listed below are fully and consistently applied.

In this circumstance the employer must ensure that:

- (a) prior to the commencement of the work, a written risk assessment has been completed in respect of the work in consultation with the persons doing the work, and

- (b) all work is undertaken in accordance with a documented safe work method statement for the task, and
- (c) the work has been authorised by the person in control of the premises, and
- (d) the persons doing the work are appropriately qualified and trained in safe work practices, including the correct use of test equipment, tools, accessories and personal protective equipment and are instructed for the particular task, and
- (e) test equipment, tools and accessories appropriate to the performance of the work have been provided to the persons performing the work, the test equipment, tools and accessories have been properly maintained, and the persons performing the work make proper use of them while performing the work, and
- (f) clothing and personal protective equipment appropriate to the performance of the work has been provided to the persons performing the work and the persons performing the work make proper use of the clothing and equipment while performing the work, and
- (g) the isolation point of the relevant electrical supply for the work has been clearly identified and, is able to be operated quickly without the need to climb over or shift obstructions, and
- (h) the work area is clear of obstruction so as to enable entry and exit quickly and safely, and
- (i) unauthorised persons are prevented from entering the work area by signage or barriers, or both, and
- (j) the work is undertaken in the presence of a safety observer who is competent to carry out the procedure being observed, and competent in electrical rescue and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

What this policy excludes

The provisions of this position paper do not apply to electrical work that is performed on the electricity supply network under the *Electricity Supply (Network Operator Safety Management) Regulation 2002* or to electrical testing referred to in clause 208 of the OHS Regulation.

What guidance is available to help me comply with this position paper?

WorkCover has produced the *Code of Practice: Low Voltage Electrical Work*. The Code provides employers with practical guidance on measures to eliminate or control the risks to employees and other workers who perform electrical work on low voltage installations or systems. The Code must be read in conjunction with this position paper as a number of the existing legislative requirements and concepts outlined in the Code have been varied, e.g. the term 'emergency situation'. **Note:** The Code is currently being revised by the Electrical Working Group to reflect the legislative proposals covered in this position paper.

In addition to the above code of practice and position paper, WorkCover has also produced three other position papers that clarify the electrical work and electrical testing provisions of the Regulation.

Click here to view the [Code of Practice – Low Voltage Electrical Work](#)

Click here to view the [Electrical Work Position Paper](#)

Click here to view the [Electrical Testing and Fault Finding Position Paper](#)

Click here to view the [Extra Low Voltage Position Paper](#)

Further information

For further information contact your local WorkCover NSW office listed in the telephone directory or ring the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 or visit WorkCover's website at www.workcover.nsw.gov.au.

Note: This policy position should be read in conjunction with the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000*.

**Produced by the State Coordinator – Electrical
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