

Media Release



Government of South Australia

Office of Consumer and
Business Affairs

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Don't let your insulation plans go up in smoke

SA home owners are being warned to ensure insulation is installed correctly in their roof space after two house fires have been blamed on the incorrect installation of blow-in insulation, retro-fitted to existing homes.

Blow-in, or loose fill, insulation is not a safety concern in itself – as long as it is installed correctly.

“The energy saving benefits of installing insulation in the roof space of a home are well known. It is less well known that insulation installed too close to electrical fittings, such as exhaust fans and ceiling down lights, can potentially cause a fire,” says the Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Mal Hemmerling.

“It has come to my attention that two house fires have occurred in South Australia where the combination of electrical fittings and incorrectly installed blow-in insulation is believed to be the cause.”

The Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) advises that the main fire safety issue appears to be with the incorrect installation of loose fill or blow-in insulation rather than fixed batt insulation. Blow-in insulation is usually made from recycled paper and funnelled into the ceiling via a flexible hose. Blow-in insulation can be moved around by drafts in the roof space if not secured in position.

Any type of insulation installed too close or covering electrical devices can reduce the heat dissipation properties of the device, which can cause it to overheat. Loose insulation can also jam the blades of an exhaust fan causing the motor to overheat.

The Office of the Technical Regulator (OTR) is responsible for administering the Electrical Wiring Rules (AS/NZS 3000-2007) and regularly audits domestic wiring installations.

“A number of homes have failed installation safety inspections and the problem is most prevalent with contractors installing blow-in insulation in to existing houses, rather than new home constructions,” says the Technical Regulator, Rob Faunt.

Homeowners with retro-fitted blow-in insulation should arrange a safety inspection by a qualified electrician to ensure that blow-in insulation is secured and that appropriate covers or barriers are in place to allow heat to escape around lights and fans. Consumers are within their rights to have any substandard work rectified by those responsible.

Homeowners who are considering electrical work in proximity to blow-in insulation should ensure the work is done by a licensed electrician who should be aware of the safety requirements.

Consumers who are considering installing blow-in insulation should ensure the work is done by a licensed building work contractor.

The Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA) has met with the technical and fire authorities to discuss the safety issues and possible regulatory options to ensure insulation contractors meet basic installation safety requirements.

Mr Hemmerling said “This is a proactive approach to address the safety concerns of poorly installed blow-in insulation.”

A national working party has also been formed, comprising officials from consumer affairs and product safety agencies, to progress the matter at a national level.

There is a voluntary Australian Standard that covers the installation of insulation (AS3999-1992) that could form a basis for a new mandatory safety standard in SA.

“SA authorities welcome the Commonwealth Government’s initiative to reimburse households for installing insulation, and we are working with the Commonwealth to ensure that the safety issues are addressed in the rollout of the free insulation program and in the training provided to installers.”

More information about insulation safety is available from OCBA’s product safety section on 8152 0732 or at www.ocba.sa.gov.au or contact the Office of the Technical Regulator on 8226 5518.

To find a licensed builder or electrician visit the Licensing Public Register at www.ocba.sa.gov.au/licensing/