

# Tagging the Sunshine State

Although Australia is one nation, it currently has different testing and tagging legislation in each State, writes Sarah Allen.

Testing and tagging legislation in most States is comparable; however the testing and tagging regulations in Queensland differ greatly from the rest of the country.

Queensland legislation in this area is driven by the *QLD Electrical Safety Act 2002* and *QLD Electrical Safety Regulations 2002*. It is highly prescriptive, with a number of key differences to the other States.

In fact Queenslanders will notice no change in the area of electrical safety when the new National Workplace Health and Safety legislation is implemented in January 2012. The current Queensland legislation will continue to override the changes and we will therefore continue to face the same dilemmas when conducting business across State borders.

The much needed harmonisation really won't be providing us all with that much harmony when it comes to electrical safety!

The key areas of difference are in licensing, training, repairs and the different testing requirements for different classes of work.

## Licensing and training

I recently attended a seminar conducted by the QLD Electrical Safety Office about licensing. It was refreshing to see a Government department so actively keen to explain the way their legislation worked, and the presentation put on by the QLD Electrical Safety Office was clear, concise and easy to understand. In saying that, there was a definite "don't shoot the messenger" attitude towards some of the more



difficult questions raised by attendees which really could have provided the Electrical Safety Office with excellent feedback on the way safety legislation is actually being implemented in real life.

In Queensland, an employee of an organisation who has been deemed competent by their employer can complete testing and tagging for their organisation. There are no special courses to complete, and no special licences to hold. However, should that same person wish to offer test and tag services to another organisation (of which they are not an employee) and wish to profit from providing that service, the person will need to have completed a nationally-recognised test and tag course and hold a Restricted QLD Electrical Contractor's licence.

Some may argue that this creates a large barrier to entry and that only

dedicated professionals will bother to jump through these hoops to establish a business. But the nationally-recognised course (UEENEE008B) is a good course, and I firmly believe that regardless of your State of operation that this is the course any technician wishing to offer this service should complete. However, like most courses of eight hour duration, there is limited practical component. In my experience, two weeks of in-depth practical training on testing and tagging should be the minimum amount of training undertaken – along with the expectation of a very steep learning curve for at least six months!

The more difficult component is licensing. Anyone that has secured a QLD Electrical Contractor's licence (restricted or otherwise) will tell you that just completing the form is a challenge!



There are both business and technical components to address, and additional courses to complete if you cannot validate your business experience. Consumer protection insurance is also required in addition to your public liability insurance.

These annual licensing costs are not applicable in any other State, and I wonder whether the holding of a licence makes the technician any more competent in providing a test and tag service?

### Repairs

If you wander in to the electrical section of your local hardware store you will see rows and rows of plugs and sockets for sale. I certainly don't see too many electricians buying them, and can

only assume that the constant spruiking from State electrical safety regulators imploring the general public to refrain from completing their own electrical work is falling on deaf ears.

In all States (excluding Queensland), persons who have been deemed competent are permitted to replace plugs and sockets of portable electrical equipment as part of their business service offering. They are not deemed competent to install hot water services, nor fix GPOs, nor install lighting. They are simply deemed competent enough to replace a faulty plug with a new one or repair a plug that may be loose with exposed conductors. Competent technicians then confirm the repair has been completed correctly by testing the appliance with a portable appliance

tester, and then return the safe item to service.

In Queensland, despite the local hardware store still stocking the same volumes of plugs and sockets (and therefore the assumption that the general public are also dangerously completing their own illegal electrical work), competent persons are not permitted to replace plugs and sockets regardless of whether the item is tested before it is returned to service. Interestingly, the local plumber is permitted to apply for a restricted electrical licence in Queensland in order to connect a hot water service, but a competent person charged with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of appliances is not permitted to even change a plug top! ➤



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In my experience, items that have failed testing and removed from service regularly find their way back in to service within a matter of days. They could have bright red flashing neon lights on them saying 'DANGER' but experience tells me they still get used by a staff member who believes "it looks OK" and then subsequently receives an electric shock from a faulty plug top.

According to the QLD Electrical Safety Office, local test and tag technicians are simply responsible for alerting the workplace to the failed items and then removing them from service. What happens to those items once the technician has left site is then the responsibility of the client. It does raise the question: is this section of the Electrical Safety Act really doing all it can to ensure workplace safety?

#### **But I have an RCD!**

While any electrician worth his salt knows that an RCD is not the be all and end all for electrical safety, they also know that RCDs have and will continue to save lives.

Quite rightly, the QLD Electrical Safety Regulations stipulate the installation of fixed RCDs in all manufacturing environments. However, the regulations also state that if you have RCDs protecting every circuit of your office then you are not required to complete testing and tagging on any of your portable electrical appliances.

With the ability to seemingly work from anywhere (as I write I am in a remote part of Victoria typing on a computer with not one RCD in sight!), along with the blurring of our work and personal lives, business could be

leaving itself open should an employee receive an electric shock from a portable electrical appliance outside of the traditional workplace.

There is a reason for all this legislation in Queensland. If you go back in history, Queensland had the worst electrical safety record in the country. The statistics have improved, but there is still a way to go. While we are supportive of, and can see the benefits of licensing for testing and tagging, the fact that suitably trained and competent technicians cannot complete minor repairs is clearly a failure in the current legislation that must be addressed. ■

*If you would like any further information, contact Sarah on 1300 287 669, by emailing [sarah@atservices.com.au](mailto:sarah@atservices.com.au) or visiting [www.appliancetagging.com.au](http://www.appliancetagging.com.au).*

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