

# Training – Maintaining your ‘skilled person’ status

The definition of a “skilled person” recently added to BS7671:2008 (2015) specifically mentions the need for training. Alan Riley, director of training at Electrical Safety UK discusses the importance of on-going training to maintain this status

**T**he IET Wiring Regulations has recently removed the term “competent” person from the definitions within the standard.

The term now used is “skilled” person, which specifies the need for adequate education, training and practical skills appropriate to the nature of the work being undertaken. Immediate thoughts go towards how a new entrant into the industry gains the level of skills needed to work in an electrical role. Perhaps more importantly we should be looking at how an existing skilled person maintains the level of skills needed to remain safe in the workplace.

●● **At what point should the awareness hit that skills are lacking to the point that danger will exist?** ●●

It’s commonly known the UK has an “ageing” workforce, with much reliance being made of the skills held by people who did their original trade training many years previous. Although it is fair to say many of our skilled workers have an extremely good understanding of how their trade has moved on over the years, there are many more that still work to the standards that they first met when they entered the trade. Having stood in front of so many groups of electrical skilled people to update their knowledge of BS7671 and in particular their understanding of the procedures required for inspecting and testing a completed installation, it is clear



Alan Riley, director of training at Electrical Safety UK

that keeping up with trade skills is not high on many people’s agenda.

When asked the question, who in the group makes ‘design decisions’ in relation to an electrical installation, many of those attending training will respond with “not me”. But then, when asked if they are responsible for the selection of cable sizing or accessory type it becomes clear little consideration is given to such decisions. Now you could say with years of experience an electrical installer does not need to calculate out every decision or base a selection choice on a pre-determined risk assessment of the site. But when the Installer does not see the reasoning for these choices having

importance, then it is clear that complacency is playing a big part on the quality of their work. They may get through hundreds of installs with reliance on their gut instinct of what is needed to satisfy the requirements, but times have changed.

Sadly, the foresight to ensure a workforce remains up to date with the developments in their trade only tends to occur following the intervention of an outside agency. This could be through licensing authority control or an insurance company request. At worst it could be through intervention by the HSE.

Of course on the other hand it may be that new technology drives the need for enhancing our skills. The revolution that is taking place in the lighting industry for example, with the creation of affordable and practical LED solutions which is opening up a whole range of opportunities for installers to consider. Those that are smart will clearly see the benefits of understanding the ‘tech’ behind the modern control systems, giving their business the edge over rival competitors when it comes to complex installs. Why on earth would you wait to open the door of your house to turn on the lights on a dark night when you could easily turn them on from the comfort of your car seat using your mobile!

Who decides when additional training is needed? As we know, it’s the employer’s responsibility to ensure the employees have the ability to carry their work in a safe manner. It’s also the employee’s responsibility to inform their employer if they feel they cannot. But at what point should the awareness hit that skills are lacking to the point that danger will exist. We assume the riskier the task the greater the need for caution. But often it can be the simplest of things that create the most

danger. Electricians use test instruments. Test instruments provide readings. These readings tell us if an installation is safe. A favourite question to ask is, before pressing the button, what value should you expect to get once the button is pressed? Many simply press, read, records with very little understanding of the relevance of the value being taken. Experience tells you what value to expect but training explains why that value is acceptable, or not as the case may be.

#### TRAINING MUST ENGAGE WITH THE ATTENDEES TO BE EFFECTIVE

For any training course to be effective it has to engage with the attendees. Courses that focus on regulations and procedures do pose a challenge in this area. To meet commercial constraints

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many of the popular electrical regulatory training courses are woefully short on delivery time so the luxury of having time to break away from the flow of the course is extremely difficult. However, railroading

through with regulation after regulation is a sure fired recipe for causing the concentration to drift, certainly after the complimentary mid-day buffet has been consumed and the afternoon session plods on. What is needed is the right balance between informative, subjective provision of information and carefully constructed breakout sessions or other non-theoretical based interludes which provide a pause in the monotony but keep the training momentum going.

The construction of a carefully planned training delivery is key to keeping the training audience enthused whilst the message goes across. The importance of selecting training providers with sufficient experience of training delivery should always be foremost in the selection process when choosing a provider. ER



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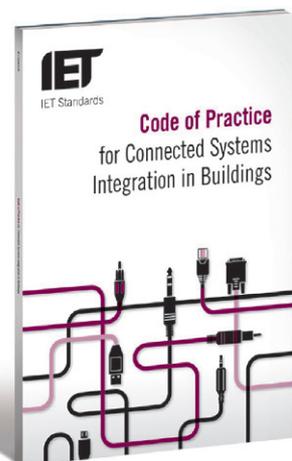
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