

Landlords and portable appliances



This is the second of three articles providing guidance to landlords regarding their responsibility for electrical safety in their rented properties. It considers the dangers associated with portable appliances, the requirements of legislation and regulation, and the safety checks that should be carried out on portable appliances.

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System* recognizes that the majority of electric current fatalities in homes result from deficiencies in plugs, leads and appliances, with only 10 % of fatalities resulting from a deficiency in fixed electrical installations.

The inappropriate use or misuse of any hand-held electrical appliance will inevitably create an increased risk to the user. For example, after using an appliance, the user may wind the cable around the appliance, such as an iron, and create a twist or 'kink' in the cable. Repeating this process over time may lead to cable damage and the risk of electric shock or fire.

To ensure that such risks are controlled, landlords can take reasonable precautions to ensure that portable electrical equipment they provide is safely used, stored and checked.

Legal requirements

In 1973, the European 'Low Voltage Directive', which relates to the harmonization of laws regarding electrical equipment, was adopted by Member States and, in 1993, the 'CE Marking Directive' was also adopted.

These Directives are implemented in the UK

through the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 1994.

Simply speaking, the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations require that electrical equipment is:

- **Safe.** There should be no risk, apart from one reduced to a minimum, that the electrical equipment will in any way cause death or personal injury to any person. This requirement also extends to domestic animals and damage to property.
- **Constructed in accordance with principles generally accepted within Member States as constituting good engineering practice in relation to safety matters.** Good engineering practice is generally understood to mean that it complies with the specifications of a harmonized standard, or an equivalent level of safety. The landlord should therefore check that the appliance at least has a CE mark. CE marking attached to a product is a manufacturer's claim that it meets all the requirements of the European legislation. Other recognized marks, such as the British Standard Kitemark and the 'BEAB Approved' mark, indicate that an appliance has been assessed by an independent body as complying with the relevant product standard.
- **Designed and constructed to conform with the principal elements of the safety objectives.** Amongst other things this will require that the appliance:
 - ~ is used safely and for the purpose for which it is made

~ has the manufacturer's brand name or trade mark clearly printed on the equipment or, where necessary, the packaging.

The guidance booklet 'Repairs - a guide for landlords and tenants', published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) states that, if a landlord provides any electrical appliances as part of a tenancy, the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations require him or her to ensure that the appliances are safe when first supplied.

Although there is no requirement for portable appliance testing to be carried out in rented accommodation, the landlord is required to take reasonable steps to ensure that appliances such as electric kettles, fridges and washing machines provided as part of the tenancy agreement are safe.

The DCLG guidance indicates that when accommodation is re-let, the electrical appliances will be classed as being supplied to that tenant for the first time, and should therefore be re-checked.

Inspecting electrical appliances

The types of checks that should be considered as necessary fall into two categories:

- 1) checks that may be carried out by the user or landlord
- 2) checks that need to be carried out by a 'skilled person'. A skilled person is one with technical knowledge or sufficient experience, such as an electrician, to enable him or her to avoid dangers which electricity may create.

The checks that a user or landlord should be able to carry out safely include confirming that:

- there are no cuts or abrasions in the cable covering
- the plug has no cracked casing or bent pins
- there are no loose parts or screws
- there are no signs of burning, particularly at the plug
- the outer covering of the cable is gripped by the cord grip in the plug top such that no coloured cable cores are visible from outside the plug. The function of the cord grip is to prevent the internal connections being pulled loose.

These checks do not require the use of tools, and should be carried out by the user before each use of a portable appliance.

It is important to note that the large majority of dangerous defects in electrical appliances can be detected by such visual inspection.

The checks that need to be carried out by a skilled person will include all of the above, plus confirming that:

- the connections inside the plug are correct and secure
- the fuse inside the plug is of the correct rating
- no bare wires are visible other than at the terminals
- there is no sign of internal damage, overheating or entry of liquid, dust or dirt.

A skilled person is likely to use a proprietary portable appliance tester to check the electrical characteristics of an electrical appliance.

The skilled person is able to use this type of tester to carry out a series of tests on an appliance, including tests for continuity and insulation resistance.

Testing should be carried out by properly trained and experienced operatives. Further guidance can be sought from one of the organizations listed below.



BRE Certification Ltd working in partnership with the Electrical Contractors' Association
Phone: 0870 609 6093
www.partp.co.uk



British Standards Institution
Phone: 01442 278 577
www.kitemarktoday.com



Electrical Contractors' Association
Phone: 0207 313 4800
www.eca.co.uk



ELECSA Ltd
Phone: 0870 749 0080
www.elecsa.org.uk



NAPIT Registration Ltd
Phone: 0870 444 1392
www.napit.org.uk

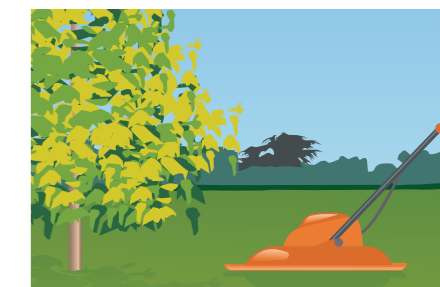


NICEIC Group Ltd
Phone: 0870 013 0382
www.niceic.com



SELECT
Phone: 0131 445 5577
www.select.org.uk

Portable equipment used outdoors



Where portable appliances can be used outdoors, it is necessary for the socket-outlet supplying the equipment to be protected by a residual current device (RCD). An RCD provides an added level of protection against electric shock, and should be used wherever there is an increased risk, as is the case when using electrical equipment outdoors.

The Electrical Safety Council recommends that all socket-outlets that may reasonably be used to supply electrical equipment for use outdoors are protected by an RCD, such as an RCD incorporated in the consumer unit (fuse box).

RCDs incorporated in a fixed installation should be tested at quarterly intervals, in accordance with the instructions that should be fixed on, or adjacent to, the consumer unit.

Where such an RCD is not incorporated in the electrical installation, the Council strongly recommends that, as a minimum, electrical equipment used outdoors is connected through a portable (plug-in) RCD. These RCDs, which can cost less than £10, should be tested before each use in accordance with the instructions provided with or on the device.

If no RCD protection is available, electrical appliances should not be used outdoors.