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Managing foil ceiling insulation risks - householders and tradespeople

There are electrical safety risks associated with ceiling spaces where foil ceiling insulation has been laid on the ceiling structure. In such cases, the foil insulation is likely to cover and has the potential to make contact with electrical cables/equipment and other services in the ceiling space.

Also, ceiling insulation faults, defective electrical cables e.g. perished or rodent-damaged cable insulation and home maintenance activities may, over time, result in electrification of the foil insulation. These factors increase the risk to householders, and to tradespeople undertaking work in ceiling spaces. Some of the associated risks may include electrocution, serious electric shock and burns.

The Electrical Safety Office has the following safety advice for householders and tradespeople needing to access the ceiling space of a house fitted with foil insulation. This advice applies whether or not the foil insulation has been electrically checked by a licensed electrical contractor since its installation.

To reduce these risks, householders and tradespeople should not enter the ceiling space of a house where foil ceiling insulation is installed. If access to the ceiling space cannot be avoided, householders and tradespeople should ensure that all sources of electricity supply to the premises are isolated before entry to the ceiling space. This may include the identification and isolation of all sources of electricity supply to the premises by a licensed electrical contractor. If there is another source of power connected to the house, such as a solar panel or generator, this must also be isolated before accessing the ceiling space. Simply turning off all main switches at the switchboard/s may not isolate all sources of electricity supply to the premises.

The Electrical Safety Office considers that the safe removal of foil from the ceiling space provides the greatest level of electrical safety. Alternatively, householders should consider the installation of safety switches for all final sub-circuits and sub-mains located in the ceiling space by a licensed electrical contractor.

Should an electric shock be experienced, however slight, it should be reported immediately to the appropriate electricity supply entity (Ergon Energy 131670; Energex 131962 or Country Energy 132356). Contact with any metal parts in the home should be avoided and all activity in the ceiling space suspended until the electrical installation is verified electrically safe.

For further electrical safety information visit www.electricalsafety.qld.gov.au or telephone 1300 650 662.

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