

Electrical Certificates Explained

-A Quick Q & A

WHEN IS AN ELECTRICITY CERTIFICATE REQUIRED?

An electricity certificate is a document that verifies that the electrical installations in a home comply with the legislated requirements detailed in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. This certificate is required when an electrical installation is intended for use or lease by a user or lessor.

WHO NEEDS TO COMPLY?

The owner of an “electrical installation” should be in possession of a valid electrical certificate at all times. Just like gas and water, electricity current has the ability to leak, and when touched, it has the ability to flow through you. The earth leakage relay is designed to monitor for leakage current going directly or indirectly to earth and when a certain value is exceeded, it will trip and disconnect the current flow.

WHY DO YOU NEED AN ELECTRICAL COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATE?

Compliance is necessary as a legal requirement. Each time a property is sold, it is contractually required that a new Electrical Compliance Certificate be issued. Because electricity is potentially dangerous, a faulty or a non-compliant installation has the ability to cause damage to property or harm to people through fire or electrocution.

WHEN IS THIS CERTIFICATE NEEDED?

For a long time, it seemed that an electrical certificate was valid forever as long as the electrical installation was not amended or worked on in any way. Shortcomings of this assumption are to be noted:

- The wear and tear of electrical equipment makes it impossible for an Electrical Compliance Certificate to be valid forever.
- The new owner cannot be expected to take the sellers word for whether the electrical installation had been amended or not.

WHAT IS THE COST OF OBTAINING AN ELECTRICAL COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATE?

There is a fee involved and this is dependent on the inspector.

- Consultation fee
- Issuing of the certificate is at no additional charge
- In the case of failure to comply, additional fees are applicable

WHAT IS CHECKED DURING INSPECTION?

A registered inspector will require access to every part of the electrical installation on the premises, including:

- The main distribution board
- Every plug
- Every light switch
- Every light fitting, etc.

This inspection must also be conducted in the garage, out buildings and even roof spaces etc. All appliances will be unplugged so that all readings can be taken. The power will also be switched off periodically. Inspectors then plug in all appliances upon completion. Should the electrical installation be 100% compliant, a new certificate will be issued.

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ELECTRICITY INSPECTION CHECKLIST:

- Main boards: Correct connections, correct cable sizes, correct circuit breakers and labelling, earth leakage operation. All items are checked to see that they are secure and covered properly.
- Plugs and switches: These are checked that they work correctly, have no worn contacts, are wired correctly, and secure. If they are metal, they are checked to see if they are earthed correctly.
- Fixed appliances: These must be connected to the installation by approved means according to the current it draws. Lights with exposed metal must be earthed correctly.
- Positioning of electrical points: Proximity of switches and lights to the shower, bath, pools, etc.
- Wiring: Correct type and rating must be used for the correct type.
- Insulation: A test is taken.
- Temporary installations: They must be installed in a manner that would imply they are permanent
- Installed devices: These must be rated correctly, installed correctly, and of approved types.

WHAT IS EXCLUDED BY THE ELECTRICAL COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATE?

- Servicing or upgrading of the electrical installation. Much like a roadworthy test on a car, all that is checked is that what exists is safe.
- Checking of actual appliances. This includes items such as ovens, hobs, aircon units, swimming pool pumps, bore hole pumps, pool lights, garage and gate motors, alarms, wall heaters and any other fixed appliances. Their connection is what gets checked.
- Temporary installations, defined as something that can simply be unplugged and removed by hand that was clearly intended for temporary use only. An example of this is a camping light.
- Work that is not required. The seller cannot be compelled to do something that is not required.

WHAT ARE THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS?

These requirements are to meet the Electrical Installation Regulations. They are as follows:

- Every lessor or user must have a certificate for the electrical installation they use.
- The certificate shall be in the format of Annexure 1. Accompanied with it must be a test report approved by the chief inspector.
- Only a registered inspector may issue a certificate.
- The inspector may refuse to issue the certificate if they find a fault until the fault is rectified.
- Any person who does electrical installation work shall ensure that a valid certificate is issued for that work.
- No person shall connect any completed or partially completed electrical installation to the electricity supply unless it has been inspected and tested and a certificate of compliance for that electrical installation has been issued.
- If additions or alterations have been done to the electrical installation, the responsible person must obtain a compliance certificate for at least the addition or alteration.
- A change of ownership may not take place if a certificate is older than two years.
- All insurance companies require a certificate of compliance.

HOW LONG IS THIS CERTIFICATE VALID FOR?

An electrical certificate can only be valid for an absolute maximum of two years, subject to no alterations or work being done during that period. Sometimes an affidavit needs to be signed to this effect.



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WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE FOR OBTAINING AN ELECTRICAL COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATE?

The seller, estate agent, or transferring attorney can make the request for an Electrical Compliance Certificate, even before selling. The requested inspector then explains the fees and payment options before obtaining permission to proceed with inspection. Once the electrical inspection and testing has been completed, a certificate of compliance is issued. If an issue arises, the registered inspector shall refuse to issue such certificate until that fault or defect has been rectified.

WHY DO YOU SOMETIMES EXPERIENCE TRIPPING PROBLEMS AFTER A CERTIFICATE HAS BEEN ISSUED?

- Following inspection, what should be earthed is earthed and the earth leakage relay is operational and trips accordingly.
- This is not actually a problem and your electrical installation doing exactly what it is designed to do to protect you from a potentially dangerous situation.
- It could be a faulty appliance or circuit.
- A new owner could be using an old appliance, which requires them to upgrade the installation.