

## The Methodist Property Office - Resourcing Mission

### Electrical Services: inspection and testing.

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Everyone is now aware that electrical installations need to be checked from time to time to ensure that they are safe. These checks and tests have become more rigorous over time, and the current position is rather complicated. The following comments are intended to help managing trustees understand the position – but, as always, please remember that it is essential that trustees keep abreast of changes and obtain independent professional advice whenever necessary (the architect or surveyor who carries out your quinquennial inspections should be able to advise you further). The legal and technical information should always be consulted for full details.

It is important to remember the distinction between the electrical installation (item 1 below), and portable electrical appliances (item 2), which are covered by different regulations.

From January 2005, electrical work in manses (i.e. domestic property) may be subject to Building Regulations consent (see Property Points 2004 Part 2).

#### 1. The Electrical Installation

The following information is based largely on BS 7671:2001 (Requirements for Electrical Installations), Guidance Note No 3 (Inspection and Testing), including Amendment No 1:2002 (referred to below as GN3), available from the Institution of Electrical Engineers, PO Box 96, Stevenage, SG1 2SD. Although this is not a mandatory document, it is normally a requirement of insurance policies and health & safety risk assessments that the recommendations in this document are complied with.

The current information about inspection and testing of installations is set out in GN3 table 3.2, which must of course be consulted for full details:

#### **Recommended initial frequencies of inspection of electrical installations:**

(Churches, halls etc and manses & rented housing)

	Routine check:	Maximum period between Inspection and testing*:
Domestic**	(not required)	10 years
Residential:	annually (plus every change of occupancy)	5 years
Churches: (inc halls etc)	annually	5 years
Where there is a public entertainments licence	annually	3 years
emergency lighting:	daily	3 years
fire alarms:	daily	1 year

\*and also after any change of occupancy, any building work, any significant increased loading or any apparent damage.

\*\*In domestic premises it is assumed that the occupier will attend to any defects as soon as they are noticed.

The '**routine check**' should be carried out by someone who is competent to understand the electrical system, but need not be electrically skilled. The check should look for any wear and deterioration, missing parts, correct labelling, and operation of test buttons etc. Notes about this 'routine check' should be included in the log-book.

The '**inspection and test**' needs to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional, and we always recommend that this should be an NICEIC Registered contractor (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting). The extent and cost of this report should be agreed beforehand with the professional concerned, as various forms are available, including for minor works, new work, and existing installations. The form required for periodic testing is *Periodic Inspection Report for an Electrical Installation* (the certificate number will be prefixed "HP"). The certificate, test results schedule and inspection report, as applicable, should all be kept with the log-book.

Managing Trustees should be aware that the above checks and inspections etc do not normally include for opening-up and inspection of every single component, but usually involve visual inspection and a test of some typical items. For the avoidance of doubt, it can be worth checking this point with the electrical contractor at the time.

## **2. Portable Electrical Appliances**

The maintenance and safety of electrical appliances which can be unplugged (ie, are portable) are covered by the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, made under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974. See also the Memorandum of Guidance on the Electricity at Work Regulations, published by HMSO. These are mandatory requirements, but the difficulty is that they are not prescriptive, that is, the level and frequency of inspection of appliances is not laid down, but "should be sufficient to prevent danger so far as is reasonably practicable" (reg 4(2)). The instructions provided with the equipment will probably give guidance on maintenance, and would be similar to that noted above under the 'routine check' of the installation: checking for any wear and deterioration, missing parts, correct labelling, and operation of test buttons etc. Managing trustees may wish to keep a list of portable equipment with the log book (which may be advisable for insurance purposes in any event), together with a note of when it was checked.

The person who can undertake work on such equipment "must have sufficient technical knowledge or experience so as to prevent danger...", and should be trained and instructed as necessary (reg 16). It appears therefore that a professional electrician does not have to undertake this work, and in many instances church members may consider they have sufficient expertise. In the case of any doubt, however, the managing trustees should consult an NICEIC Registered contractor, and they may wish to combine this with the annual routine check of the installation.

### **Schedule A**

Managing trustees will be aware that the need for such inspections and testing etc is already included as an item in the supplement to Schedule A.

### **Further information:**

See: Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 1994.

Note that fire alarm and emergency lighting systems are covered by other legislation and standards.

You should also check any requirements in your insurance policy (Methodist Insurance produce several guidance notes – tel 0161 833 9698).