NEWSLETTER
CHRISTMAS 2017

Dear Contractor,

Welcome to the CHRISTMAS 2017 ECSSA Newsletter, the first to be circulated electronically.

Ever increasing Postage costs have now reached a stage where circulating the Newsletter in Hard Copy is no longer a viable option.

2017 has seen a significant rise in activity within the construction industry, though it is probably true to say that the full effects of the upturn in the economy have yet to reach parts of rural Ireland.

However, the trend is in the right direction and it is important that Contractors are geared up for increased opportunities and do not allow the errors of the boom years, which impacted so severely on many, to be repeated.

Throughout 2017 ECSSA Members made very good use of the Technical Support Service which is available to them in response to any technical, commercial or other query which they may have.

We always work on the basis that, while all of the technical information is contained within the National Wiring Rule, it is not always easy to find, even assuming that the Contractor has ET101 with him on site and, as in all regulations which is written in a quasi-legal format, it is sometimes possible to apply several different interpretations to what is written.

It is therefore far easier to make a phone call, outline the information you require and get the correct advice on how to deal with the problem rather than taking a chance and at best take the wrong option, or at worst create a potentially dangerous situation.

Therefore, Members should always feel free to make that phone call and be rest assured that the information will be provided in a clear, accurate and friendly manner.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support in the past and to wish You and Yours a Happy & Peaceful Christmas and a Prosperous & Profitable New Year in 2018.

Mike Marshall

General Manager

IN THIS ISSUE:

Technical Queries:
064 6637266

1 | Sectoral Employment Orders (SEO) – The Importance of the Presence of ECSSA

During the year two attempts were made to introduce a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) for the Electrical Contracting Industry.

These applications were aimed at creating a replacement for the Registered Employment Agreement (REA), which was struck down in May 2013 by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional and therefore illegal.

We are all well aware of the worry, cost and despair caused to many Contractors by the combined efforts of Epace, the TEEU and the Labour Court in operating this illegal regime.

Some Contractors had to borrow large sums of money to pay the Orders made by the Labour Court, others were forced out of business and it is widely believed that this harassment was the final straw which resulted in at least three known suicides within the electrical industry.

When the illegality was finally exposed, the Directors of Epace agreed to divide over half a million euros, which had been collected under an illegal piece of legislation, between the shareholders of Epace, namely TEEU, ECA and AECI.

Common decency should have dictated that this money be returned to those from which it was illegally taken and while that situation remains unresolved, the creation of an SEO, which will provide the vehicle to start the scam all over again, should never be permitted.

On the occasion of the first application by TEEU, ECSSA on behalf of its Members made a very strong Submission to the Labour Court pointing out what had happened under REA and opposing the creation of a similar regime under a new name by the same parties.

The application was withdrawn with immediate effect by the TEEU.

A further application was made by TEEU later in the year and once again ECSSA made the same Submission in opposition.

On this occasion the National Electrical Contractors of Ireland (NECI) applied to the High Court for a Judicial Review of the manner in which the Labour Court was dealing this these applications and once again the application was withdrawn.

The interests of small and medium sized Contractors should never be sacrificed to protect the commercial interests of a few big players.

There is nothing to stop the major contractors making an agreement with the Union on behalf of their own employees but do not expect small and medium sized firms to be bound by this agreement.

Apparently, the big players want an SEO so that they can be protected from competition from European firms who might come in here and tender successfully for major Irish projects.

Trying to create this form of protectionism is totally at odds with the ethos (and probably the rules) of open competition across the EU.

Every other industry in the country has to live with competition from Europe and cannot create a closed shop for itself.

The printing industry, for example, has suffered severely from competition from companies based in mainland Europe, particularly in Spain, and nothing can be done to prevent that situation.

It would not be surprising to find large print contracts from Government and statutory bodies are now being awarded to Spanish and Italian firms.

While bodies like ECSSA remains strong, Contractors have a voice in opposing the re-creation of Epace under another name but, to be a realistic voice, which has to be taken seriously, it is important that Contractors, by renewing their Membership, or becoming Members for the first time, give a strong mandate to ECSSA to speak out fearlessly on their behalf.

While the yearly Subscription of €100 is obviously important to fund the ongoing service by ECSSA to its Members, it is equally important that a continued strength in numbers is such that neither the Labour Court nor Government can ignore the legitimate determination of Electrical Contractors to oppose the return of the illegality and abuse of power which went on under the REA and which could easily be recommenced under any future SEO.

2 | Distribution Boards Heights

Traditionally Distribution Boards in domestic and small commercial premises were mounted at a height were the top of the board was right up to the ceiling, allowing cables to come directly from the ceiling void into the board.

However, Rule 530.5.3 requires that a Distribution Board be mounted in an accessible position and sets a limit of 2.25m from the floor to the top of the Distribution Board.

2.25m was deemed to be the maximum height at which a person standing on the floor could easily reach any of the MCBs or RCDs on the top row of the Board to switch or reset these devices.

Initially this height limit did not create any problem in that the top of most Boards was, at maximum, 50mm above the level of the switches on the MCBs or RCDs.

What it did mean was that installers now had to provide trunking or other forms of containment for the cable between the ceiling and the top of the Distribution Board.

Bunching the cables together in trunking made it difficult to spread them out neatly over the top row of MCBs and to overcome this, some Manufacturers such as Garo, provide a separate empty module which could be placed on top of the Distribution Board and used to cover the cables between the ceiling and the Distribution Board.

As this empty module matched the Distribution Board in width, depth and colour, it looked far better than a separate trunking.

The natural evolution of this solution was to incorporate this empty module into the Distribution Board by making the open space over the top row of circuit breakers much higher.

The top surface of some domestic and small commercial boards is now up to 150mm above the top row of circuit breakers and provides a solution whereby the top of the board could once again be butted up to the ceiling without exceeding the 2.25m limit if that measurement were taken from the floor to the centre of the top row of MCBs.

The fact remains that it was to enable operation of the MCBs by a person standing on the floor that the 2.25m limit was initially introduced.

However, RECI/Safe Electric Inspectors continue to take the literal interpretation of Rule 530.5.3 and are measuring to the top of the board irrespective of how far above the height of the MCBs the actual top is.

We had raised the matter with ETCI prior to its destruction by CER and will bring the matter to the attention of the relevant Committee of NSAI which is working on the next edition of the National Wiring Rules.

In the mean-time there should not be any logical opposition to taking the height of the top row of the MCBs as the height limit since the present practice of measuring to the actual top of the Board is defeating the input of the manufacturers, who sought to create a solution which would avoid the unnecessary use of trunking, while still remaining within the Rules.

We will continue to make representation on this issue until common sense prevails and there is a recognition of the true intention of those who created the 2.25m limit in the first place, but in the meantime Contractors should be aware of the fact that the 2.25m measurement is still being taken to the actual top of the board.

2018 MEMBERSHIP - €100

***Access to Technical Support**
***Your Voice is represented in the Industry**
***Reduced Fees for Courses**
Tel No: 064 6637266 / Email: info@ecssa.ie

3 | Refresher One Day Course Testing

One of the inherent problems in the electrical industry is that, in large firms in particular, there appears to be a tendency to leave all testing and certification to a small group of employees.

The nett result of this is that others, who are fully qualified and competent electricians, seldom or ever get the opportunity of using Test Instruments and this lack of practice discourages them from participating in the 2 Day Accredited Verification & Certification Course and obtaining Qualified Certifier status in their own right.

In an ideal world every qualified Electrician who carries out installations should have a QC Number and should be able to competently Test and Record the Results of his Tests.

We provide practical Courses in hands on Testing and intend to continue to do so in 2018.

These Courses are aimed at giving the Participants the chance to have concentrated hands on experience of testing and would give them the confidence to later participate in the full Accredited V & C Course.

To date we have found that many, who have later come back to the do the Accredited Course, have indicated that without the confidence gained at the One Day Course, they would have been reluctant to attempt the Accredited Course.

These One Day Courses are currently offered in our Training Centre in Killarney but if the demand arises, they can be provided at a number of alternative venues around the country.

4 | Neutralising

The importance of neutralising electrical installations cannot be over-emphasised in that in an installation which is not neutralised, one is totally dependant on the effectiveness of the earth bar and the conductivity of the soil to carry any fault currents back to the secondary side of the ESB Transformer via the ESB Earth Bars.

Depending on the makeup of the general mass of earth in the area, this path back to the Transformer could have a very high resistance and would not permit a flow of current sufficiently large to trip the protective devices on the faulty circuit within the prescribed .4 second limit.

All metal parts in the installation could therefore remain live at up to full mains voltage for a dangerously long time.

Neutralising an installation prevents such a scenario in that by connecting the Customer's main earth terminal to the incoming ESB Neutral, there is a direct low impedance path back to the Transformer which permits an inrush of current sufficiently large to trip the protective device.

The vast majority of new installations are properly neutralised but however in older installations the neutralising was generally carried out by the ESB Electrician when installing the Meter.

This was done by fitting a short length, generally of 2.5sq mm cable between the Customer's earth terminal (generally an earth block in installations of that era) and the neutral terminal of the ESB Meter.

With the passage of time and the increase in installed loads, most meters have been replaced with higher current models and as ESB no longer allow neutralising at the Meter Terminal, a very significant number of older properties are not now neutralised and the Contractor who has installed an upgraded Distribution Board is left with no facility to connect a neutralising cable as in many cases the ESB Main Fuse was not replaced by the new type Cut-Out at the time as the Meter was upgraded.

While a Contractor can gain access to a terminal on the new grey cut-outs, he cannot access any connection point on the old DZ3 Fuse Units previously used by ESB and sealed to prevent access to internal connections.

A Contractor who comes across an un-neutralised installation relies on the co-operation of ESB to remove the seals on the DZ3 Main Fuse Unit to fit a neutralising link and such co-operation was not always readily forthcoming, with the Contractor being asked to submit a Completion Cert before ESB would move to assist.

In the absence of neutralising, the Fault Loop Impedance values would be far above the limits set in the National Wiring Rules and therefore the Contractor could not issue a Completion Cert, with the result that the installation remained in an un-neutralised and therefore unsafe condition.

In the December 2016 edition of the RECI/Safe Electric Newsletter, it was reported that ESB were to provide a Helpline which a Contractor could ring and ask that an ESB Technician would remove the seals on the main fuse to allow the fitting of a neutralising link.

To date, 12 months later, the Helpline Number has not been circulated to Contractors, meaning that hundreds of thousands of people are still living in danger because either their own house is not neutralised, or, even if their house is neutralised, others connected to the same ESB Transformer are not.

Already this year ESB has paid out substantial damages arising from such as scenario but does not appear to have taken any steps to address or rectify the situation.

How does it take so long to deal with what is obviously an ongoing and dangerous reality?

5 | Meter Batteries

Over the past few years it has been regularly noticed at Courses that Continuity measurement in Low Ohms has tended to give unstable and incorrect test results on the Fluke 1650 series of Multi-Function Testers.

This is not any reflection on instruments, which are probably the most popular and widely used in the electrical contracting industry, but rather an indication that Electricians using these Meters do not realise the importance of good Battery Voltage.

The first check that should be carried out is to confirm the Battery Voltage and if this is found to be under 7 Volts DC, the Batteries should be replaced.

Once the Batteries are replaced, the Meter will immediately provide stable and accurate Test Results.

6 | Verification & Certification Courses

During the past year we have had complaints from Contractors who had their Completion Certs returned because their QC Numbers had expired.

While we understand the frustration that this causes, one has to accept that as the whole regulation of the industry moves towards automation, one of the inevitable results will be that Contractors will find that their right to have Certs processed will be automatically put on hold once the expiry date of either their Insurance or Qualified Certifier Number has passed.

It is therefore vital that Contractors ensure that they do not wait until the QC validity on which they rely for certification, has expired.

If they find themselves in that position, they run the risk of not being able to immediately get on a Course and even if they can do a Course at short notice, there will be some delay before the results are issued and the QC Number renewed.

As we are all well aware a delay of even a few days in getting a new installation connected can have serious consequences for the Customer and Contractor alike.

It would therefore make sense that a provision would be put in place to enable QC Holders to complete the Accredited Course in advance of the QC Expiry Date, thereby allowing for a seamless transition once the expiry date is reached.

We have floated the idea with RECI/Safe Electric and there is broad agreement that this facility, which is in line with that provided for the NCT Test on cars, would be a desirable feature of the Qualified Certifier system.

Spring 2018 Schedule of Verification & Certification Course

No.	Date	Day	Location	Venue
1	15th & 16th January 2018	Monday & Tuesday	DUBLIN	Moran Red Cow Hotel
2	23rd & 24th January 2018	Tuesday & Wednesday	KILLARNEY	ECSSA
3	5th & 6th February 2018	Monday & Tuesday	DUBLIN	Moran Red Cow Hotel
4	12th & 13th February 2018	Monday & Tuesday	GALWAY	Clayton Hotel
5	20th & 21st February 2018	Tuesday & Wednesday	KILLARNEY	ECSSA
6	5th & 6th March 2018	Monday & Tuesday	DUBLIN	Moran Red Cow Hotel
7	12th & 13th March 2018	Monday & Tuesday	PORTLAOISE	Maldron Hotel
8	20th & 21st March 2018	Tuesday & Wednesday	KILLARNEY	ECSSA
9	9th & 10th April 2018	Monday & Tuesday	DUBLIN	Moran Red Cow Hotel
10	16th & 17th April 2018	Monday & Tuesday	SLIGO	Sligo Park Hotel
11	24th & 25th April 2018	Tuesday & Wednesday	KILLARNEY	ECSSA
12	14th & 15th May 2018	Monday & Tuesday	DUBLIN	Moran Red Cow Hotel
13	21st & 22nd May 2018	Monday & Tuesday	GALWAY	Clayton Hotel
14	22nd & 23rd May 2018	Tuesday & Wednesday	KILLARNEY	ECSSA

2018 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Company Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

_____

For Office use Only
Member No.:
Date Received:

Email Address: _____

Tel No: _____

Mobile No: _____

ECSSA Membership Number (if applicable): _____

I wish to apply for Membership of ECSSA.
I understand that ECSSA will operate as a Trade & Training Association and that some of its services will be available to Members only.

Signed _____ Date _____

Please forward completed Membership Application Form together with Cheque / Postal Order/ Bank Draft for **€100** or Credit Card details to ECSSA, Coolmore House, Park Road, Killarney, Co. Kerry

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Credit Card Number: ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Expiry Date: ☐☐/☐☐ CVV Last 3 digits: ☐☐☐

Name of Card Holder _____

(Name that appears on Card):