

Why competence is key when it comes to electrical compliance services

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Insight piece from Raphael Magnus, managing director of Safe Electric

Whether you're managing an office block, a community centre, or a string of restaurants, it's essential that your buildings' electrical systems and services are properly maintained. In practice, this means ensuring that safety checks and tests (including EICR reports, and PAT (EET), emergency lighting, and fire alarm testing) are carried out as regularly as required by law. Failure to keep your electrical installations safe and compliant can have serious repercussions - from prosecution, to accidents, and even fires.

With the safety of buildings, employees, and visitors at stake, it's in FMs' best interests to engage a competent and certified electrical compliance specialist, who can ensure that tests (and any subsequent remedial work) are carried out to the highest standards.

As costs increase across the supply chain, it might be tempting to seek out cheaper contractors. However, where compliance is concerned, safety should always come before cost savings.

The importance of electrical compliance

Electrical inspection and testing keep your building's systems safe, robust, and compliant with legislation, ensuring that any problems are identified and addressed.

At Safe Electric, we offer a range of compliance services - including Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICR). Carried out every three to five years depending on the building type, these comprehensive reports look at all the hardwiring in a property. As part of the process, a competent electrical inspector will conduct a visual inspection and live and dead tests, identifying potentially dangerous faults. A report can

then be issued, and the problems it identifies are addressed. This all ensures that the building's electrical systems and services remain safe to use.

Fire alarm and emergency lighting inspections and tests are equally important, ensuring that these essential safety systems continue to work properly. Electrical Equipment Testing (EET) (formerly known as PAT testing), meanwhile, keeps appliances safe and functional.

Those managing buildings have a duty of care to ensure that their electrical installations are safe, and regular inspections and testing are key to staying compliant.

Cheaper electrical compliance services could come at a huge cost

As part of the EICR process, your engineer will inspect and test main panels, distribution boards, lighting, socket outlets, air conditioning, and other electrical services. Producing the report itself is a significant undertaking, and any faults should be carefully outlined. Depending on the size of your building, the whole process can take anywhere from 6 - 9 hours (including paperwork), to days or even weeks.

In today's challenging business environment, FMs are under pressure to make cost savings - but paying less for this kind of essential electrical compliance service is a false economy. Inadequate EICRs produced by underqualified contractors could put your business at risk, failing to cover all the systems in a building, or to identify dangerous faults.

FM's should be on their guard against companies that offer to carry out work at low prices. In reality, electrical inspections and testing cannot be conducted quickly or cheaply. Complex and time-consuming, they should be undertaken by a fully qualified professional. The challenges associated with EICRs alone are numerous, and installations vary dramatically from building to building. Where one commercial property might be controlled by the latest Building Management System (BMS), an otherwise identical site could have old wiring and inefficient lighting. The rules and regulations around compliance are also complex, and it takes an experienced industry professional to interpret and apply them.

In short, if the price you are quoted for this important and challenging work seems too good to be true, it probably is. Similarly, if your inspections and tests are over within a matter of minutes, you might want to question the results. The process should be thorough and considered, rather than a race to the finish line. Beware, too, of EICR reports that are produced quickly and seem light on detail. The length of your report will depend on the number of issues or faults identified. For small offices, EICRs can run to between 30 and 100 pages. Larger workplaces may receive reports that are over 1000 pages in length.

Inadequate reports usually need to be reproduced, and poorly executed work corrected - all at a cost to the business. Competence is key

The solution lies with both the construction industry and FMs themselves. The latter must prioritise quality and safety, ensuring that they engage competent electrical contractors to carry out compliance work. While accreditations like SafeContractor and ConstructionLine can be a marker of quality, badges don't necessarily mean that a company is equipped to meet your needs. When engaging a contractor, ask to see the certificates their engineer holds; you're looking for a qualified, time-served individual, who can prove that they are competent.

A competent contractor will conduct thorough inspections and tests, produce a detailed report, and explain

it to you in terms you understand. This report may not tell you what you want to hear – but it should outline what you, as an FM, need to know about your building’s installations.

The contractor may then recommend that you engage a different electrician for remedial work, to avoid conflicts of interest.

Ultimately, investing in expert service will pay dividends, guaranteeing that your building remains safe, functional, and fully compliant.

The construction industry also has a role to play in raising and upholding standards. Electricians must continue to undertake training, bringing themselves up to speed with the latest requirements. Safe Electric is part of a ‘round-robin’ group of contractors, which meets to discuss changing rules and regulations, and to establish how they should be interpreted.

More also needs to be done to ensure that the next generation of electricians is well-trained and competent. Mentoring and apprenticeships can help, producing qualified engineers with practical experience. Ultimately, electrical compliance is about the safety of, not just buildings, but those who use them – something you simply can’t put a price on. To learn more about Safe Electric, visit www.safe-electric.com.