



Speech by

**Hon. Cameron Dick**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

Hansard Thursday, 25 February 2010

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Electrical Safety, Insulation Installation**

**Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (9.55 am): Electrical safety has been a topic of considerable discussion in this House in recent days, particularly with regard to ceiling insulation. In Queensland, the Electrical Safety Office, or ESO, has been established as the independent regulator on electrical safety issues. The ESO is responsible for investigating electrical safety incidents and has more than 40 safety inspectors on the job.

Members would recall that I have previously provided information to this House on 10 November last year and again on 11 February this year, outlining some of the actions that the Queensland government and the ESO in particular have undertaken in response to electrical safety incidents within the ceiling insulation industry. Since I provided the most recent update, federal minister Peter Garrett on 19 February 2010 announced that the federal government's Home Insulation Program would be discontinued and will be replaced by a household Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme. In announcing these changes, Minister Garrett reaffirmed his commitment to pay for electrical inspections of all existing foil installations funded under the former home insulation program.

The Electrical Safety Office has also identified possible ongoing risks for homeowners and electricians and other tradespersons associated with foil insulation. For these reasons, the Electrical Safety Office has this week issued safety advice to electricians, tradespersons and householders, warning of these risks and providing advice in dealing with them. This information is available on the Electrical Safety Office website at [www.eso.qld.gov.au](http://www.eso.qld.gov.au) and is being distributed to electricians and licensed contractors throughout the state.

Electrical workers undertaking work in these homes are at risk when working on electrical equipment and have been reminded of their obligation to operate safely. Other tradespeople such as plumbers, pest controllers and communications technicians who perform maintenance and other works in these homes may also be at risk, and have been advised to switch off power to all circuits before entering the ceiling space. Homeowners with foil ceiling installations are advised to stay out of the ceiling space and to report any electric shock or unusual electrical activity.

Furthermore, this week the Electrical Safety Office attended a meeting in Canberra with the federal minister and various industry representatives to outline to the federal government their views on safety aspects for existing insulation installations and the proposed new scheme. Among the groups who also provided input were the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union; the Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union; the Australian Foil Insulation Association; Master Electricians; the National Electrical and Communications Association; the Master Builders Association; and the Housing Industry Association.

The ESO is typically notified of electrical incidents by the police, emergency services or by energy suppliers. These complaints can also be referred to the ESO by another government agency or come from the public via phone, fax, email, letter or in person. As at last week, the ESO was making inquiries into 56 complaints involving insulation installation. These include investigations into the three fatal incidents that have occurred in Queensland. All these investigations need to run their course, without disruption or

intervention from politicians. The Electrical Safety Office and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland are independent and have my full support to continue conducting thorough investigations, leaving no stone unturned. If the investigations and evidence support a prosecution, I expect that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear.

All employers and duty holders should be aware of and comply with their legal obligations under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 and the Electrical Safety Act 2002. As the minister responsible for electrical and workplace health and safety in this state, I will continue to take all measures necessary to protect Queensland workers and householders.