

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Minister for Housing and Community Development:

Residual Current Devices (RCDs) in Territory Housing Assets

1. With regard to the Coronial Inquest (2007) into the death of Monica Presley on 6 March 2005, please advise of what work has been undertaken to ensure that RCDs) are installed in all Territory Housing assets.
2. Please provide details of the extent to which the seven recommendations proposed by Territory Housing and adopted by the Coroner have been complied with.
3. Please provide details of each and every Territory Housing asset that does not currently have RCD devices installed with this information to be collated according to urban or remote locality and further by suburb or community.

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1. A significant number of Residual Current Devices (RCDs) installations and switchboard upgrades have been undertaken in urban and remote assets since 2007.

Recently, the department entered into five regional panel contracts for the audit of RCDs to ensure completeness of the program that commenced in 2007, including the installation and completion of any subsequent rectification works. This work was undertaken in conjunction with the 10 year renewal of the smoke alarms installed between 2005 and 2007, with the works expected to be completed in early 2017.

2. The extent to which the seven recommendations proposed by Territory Housing and adopted by the Coroner have been complied with, is as follows:

Recommendation 1. Install RCDs in all Territory Housing assets, across a three to five year period. The cost is approximately \$9 million.

The department has contracts in place for targeted RCD compliance inspections, including upgrade and replacement of components. A full review is expected by early 2017.

Existing RCDs are tested during all vacate and upgrade works, prior to a dwelling being allocated to a tenant. In remote communities, the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) and Stronger Futures Northern Territory (SFNT) upgrade programs have affected the majority of remote community dwellings, with RCD installs and switchboard upgrades. The remaining assets that were not part of the NPARIH and SFNT programs are being reviewed to ensure compliance.

All new assets that have undergone a major upgrade of works in relation to an electrical upgrade are compliant.

Recommendation 2. Shift of emphasis from a reactive to a proactive approach to maintenance repairs by increasing expenditure on planned maintenance in the expectation of decreasing the level of unplanned repairs.

The Coroner's recommendations were based on the circumstances of the case, and at the time, focused on the electrical safety of dwellings and in particular evaporative air cooler units.

As part of the response to the Coroner’s recommendations, planned maintenance on evaporative air cooler units is carried out in the Tennant Creek and Alice Springs regions to ensure that the units are mechanically sound, electrically safe and compliant.

Evaporative air cooler units are not installed in properties in the northern area of the Northern Territory. Air conditioners installed by tenants, with consent from the department, are the responsibility of the tenant, as with all other personal electrical appliances (for example, microwaves, televisions and fridges).

Recommendation 3. Update the reporting mechanisms for urgent and immediate maintenance repairs, incorporating a protocol for recording and follow-up of completion of these work orders.

All housing repairs and maintenance contracts now contain a key performance indicator for measuring the performance of the contractor against timeliness and quality of work:

Assessable criteria: Responsive repairs and maintenance		Benchmark
Immediate Works	Attend to and render safe with four hours’ notification.	100%

These key performance indicators are regularly reviewed with the contractors.

Recommendation 4. Regularise auditing of electrical contractors licensing and quality of works.

Housing contractors are required to provide copies of all trade and contractor licenses annually.

Recommendation 5. Develop and implement a planned maintenance and replacement program in conjunction with other jurisdictions in Australia.

As outlined in Recommendation 2, the Coroner's recommendations were based on the circumstances of the case, and at the time, focused on the electrical safety of dwellings, and in particular evaporative air cooling units.

As part of the response to the Coroner's recommendations, planned maintenance on evaporative air cooling units is carried out to ensure the units are mechanically sound, electrically safe and compliant. A current audit is underway to confirm that all dwellings have compliant RCDs with appropriate safety devices to cut power to the circuits when electrical malfunctions occur within the appliances or circuits.

Evaporative air cooling units are only installed by the department in properties in the southern region of the Northern Territory. Air conditioners installed by tenants, with consent from the department, are the responsibility of the tenant, as with all other personal electrical appliances (for example, microwaves, televisions and fridges).

Recommendation 6. Develop and implement a health and safety plan for Territory Housing, including the establishment of a database to record accidents and incidents, including house fires.

The department has a health and safety policy, and house fires are recorded on a register maintained by the department.

For any complaints, incidents or accidents involving a tenant or tenancy, the department has a system tool that records complaints, police attendance and Public Housing Safety Officer/Case Officer reports.

The department's Work Health and Safety Committee meets quarterly and the department has an incident reporting system that records incidents that occur to department staff.

Recommendation 7. Investigate the quality standards of new air coolers.

All evaporative air cooling units must comply with AS2913 evaporative air conditioning equipment.

3. Please provide details of each and every Territory Housing asset that does not currently have RCD devices installed with this information to be collated according to urban or remote locality and further by suburb or community.

One hundred (100) per cent RCD installation compliance in all assets is expected by early 2017.