Media Release

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Keeping safe with electricity this winter

Many of us may be doing work around our homes on the days when the weather isn't too cold and wintery. This could be doing jobs outdoors such as repairs or maintenance to property, or doing work indoors such as laying underfloor insulation.

Energy Safety*****, which is part of the Ministry of Economic Development, is reminding homeowners and DIYers to be aware of the potential risks when working with or, around electricity. It also has some advice for making sure your electrical appliances are in a safe condition.

Planning your work
When doing any type of electrical work, or working around electricity, it is essential that any potential hazards or risks are identified and eliminated.

Plan ahead before starting any work around the home, whether it's inside or outside. Make sure you locate internal electrical cabling, outside power lines or underground electricity cables, gas and water pipes.

If you are going to be working outside near power lines, such as trimming or removing trees, cleaning gutterings, replacing spouting, painting or water blasting, repairing roofs or chimneys, make sure your electricity supplier turns off the power first.

When you're handling any tall objects, such as ladders near power lines, keep an eye on what is above you - don't let them come in contact with power lines. You should keep yourself and any objects you are handling, at least four metres away from overhead power lines.

Installing underfloor insulation
Now that it's winter, many of us may be thinking about installing underfloor thermal insulation, such as aluminium foil. Before starting any work you need to be aware of the risk of electrical shock and electrocution when using staples to install this type of insulation.

When stapling underfloor insulation it is essential to keep staples well clear of any power cables. Identify the location of cables before starting work and, where required, use cable protection to eliminate the possibility of stapling into cables.

Turning off the power, while installing the insulation, is strongly recommended. However, turning off the power will not necessarily eliminate the electric shock hazard. A damaged power cable can still make the aluminium foil live when power is turned back on and create the same electric shock hazard. This could result in a fatal shock and there is also risk of an electrically initiated fire if an electrical cable is damaged during the installation. If you have any concerns about being able to do this work safely yourself, use a professional insulation installer.

Residual Current Devices
Investing in a Residual Current Device (RCD), could save your life, or the lives of your family and friends. RCDs are an electrical safety device and are to the electrical industry what seat belts are to the motor industry. When using electricity outside,

you should always use a RCD or an isolating transformer, to protect yourself against fatal electric shock. All RCD devices come with a test button which enables the user to test or check the device is working properly – RCDs should be tested regularly.

All new homes must be fitted with RCDs, including any extensions to existing houses. RCDs can also be easily fitted to existing homes as well. They offer excellent protection in the damp areas of your home, such as bathrooms and when working with equipment outside.

Electrical appliances
Now is also a good time to check your electrical appliances, including electric blankets, heaters and clothes dryers, for damage and wear and tear. Check the power cords and plugs for damage, exposed wires or signs of overheating.

Make sure your electrical appliances are operating correctly. Check for any unusual noises, or if anything is broken or damaged, including power cords. If there are any loose parts, signs of overheating or burning, don't use the appliance and get it checked by a licensed electrical worker immediately. If you have an appliance repaired ask the repairer to fit an inspection tag to show that it has been tested properly after repair.

Check electric heaters for wear and tear. Heaters may require cleaning every so often, especially fan heaters. This can be done by first unplugging the heater and simply vacuuming the inlet and outlet grills to remove dust. But do not dismantle the heater for cleaning.

With clothes driers the lint filter should be cleaned out each time before use.

Electric blankets should be checked for damage and wear before they are used - check the control switch, cord, and plug, and look for any kinks, worn wires, scorch marks, or breaks in the heating element. Remember, electric blankets have a limited life and if there is any doubt about their safety throw them out and replace them.

Don't tangle with tingles - if you receive electric shocks or tingles from an appliance turn it off, unplug it, do not use it, and get it checked out immediately.

Whenever a licensed electrical worker is working in your home, ask if they can check that your electrical appliances, equipment and installations are safe, or to recommend a qualified person that can.

Licensed electrical workers, electrical appliance repairers and servicing agents are listed in the *Yellow Pages*.

Get professional help
If you have any doubts or concerns about working with electricity you should seek professional help. Use a licensed electrical worker for all electrical work or repairs.

Homeowners who have any questions or need further advice should contact Energy Safety on free phone 0508 377 4636 or visit: www.energysafety.govt.nz

*****Energy Safety is the government agency responsible for ensuring the safe supply and use of electricity and gas.