

Electricity Safety Month 2020

Questions & Answers

Question	Answer
<p>What is National Electricity Safety Month? And what does Eskom aim to achieve with it?</p>	<p>Electricity Safety Month is a month that we dedicate to raising awareness about the safe use of electricity. If we had our way, every month would be electricity safety month! But by committing 31 days once a year we really place electrical safety in the spotlight to assist in meeting our objective of ensuring zero harm to members of the public, employees and contractors.</p> <p>In truth we run public safety programmes across the country throughout the year, using various communication methods, aimed at educating the public on the safe use of electricity and the dangers of illegal connections. We want South Africans to understand that these can lead to the injury or death of someone close to them – and that this is all avoidable.</p>
<p>Why is it important for the public to be aware, and care, about how they use electricity?</p>	<p>Simply because it is in the interest of all South Africans to do so. Being cautious around electricity can save lives and livelihoods – think of your loved ones, neighbours and broader community.</p> <p>No-one should underestimate the power of electricity, and what it can do if not respected. We want to raise awareness of this safety message by arming communities with information on how to identify unsafe situations around electricity, knowing what to do and what not to do when faced with unsafe electrical connections and knowing what may occur in these situations.</p>
<p>What is an illegal connection?</p>	<p>It is an electrical connection made to the electricity network to avoid payment for electricity, i.e. the network is tapped into without installing a meter and without the permission of the owner of the network such as Eskom or the municipality. This is illegal because the connection is made without entering into a service contract with Eskom or a municipality and using electricity without paying – that is theft</p>
<p>Are illegal connections increasing?</p>	<p>Unfortunately, yes, electricity theft, including illegal connections, meter tampering and bypassing, and the buying and selling of illegal prepaid vouchers remains a serious concern for South Africa, costing the economy approximately R20 billion every year.</p>
<p>Where are the biggest problem areas?</p>	<p>The provinces where most energy losses happen, in no particular order, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga,</p>

<p>What are the main dangers related to illegal connections?</p>	<p>Limpopo, North West, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.</p> <p>People die. In 2019/20 131 people died due to contact with electricity last year - 38 were children. Illegal connections also overload the electricity network beyond the capacity for which it was designed. This leads to the system tripping, resulting in unplanned power outages that affect the functioning of schools, clinics and traffic lights. This affects our country and economy negatively.</p>
<p>What has been done to address the issue?</p>	<p>Eskom conducts regular area inspections, awareness campaigns such as customer forums, school visits, media campaigns, engaging with community leaders and community forums in areas where illegal connections are rife. We continuously remove these illegal connections but often they are put up again as soon as the technicians leave the area.</p> <p>Eskom will no longer replace broken or overloaded equipment in an area if the area does not pay for the electricity, has illegal connections or if residents are tampering with their meters.</p> <p>This approach has been a success in Gauteng, and the Eskom teams are focusing specifically on areas with low payment and high numbers of illegal connections. We are also installing prepaid meters and converting old meters to prepaid. The Gauteng team is also more strictly monitoring consumption levels in order to identify the low- or no-buying customers proactively. These customers will then be investigated and action taken.</p> <p>Eskom also has interactions and awareness sessions with various stakeholders (Councillors, Schools, SAPS, Fire Departments and Local Community Leaders) to have a co-ordinated approach in addressing this concern. Eskom will continue to treat illegal connections as a serious crime that endangers lives.</p>
<p>What are the tell-tale signs that a household has illegal and unsafe connections or that a house presents an electrical danger?</p>	<p>Illegal connections are usually easy to spot. Here is what to look out for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wires tied to trees • Electricity poles that are easy to reach: • Powerlines running under trees • Wires touching fences or running along a roof • Wires running along the ground or on pathways • Wires attached to each other with tape or plastic bags • There will be many cables around a source, the area will resemble a maze or spider web

<p>How does Eskom detect/monitor these illegal connections?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eskom will not put a transformer in anyone's yard <p>We detect illegal connections by responding to complaints of illegal tapping, and by performing audits on meters to ensure that people are paying for the electricity they use. We also have exception reports which can identify customers who have not purchased electricity for a certain period, we then follow up to see if they are using electricity illegally. Lastly, we also do sweeps to disconnect illegal connections. This can however become risky as communities sometimes respond with violence.</p>
<p>Could you tell me what are the risks that come with these connections? On people making them and people who live in the area?</p>	<p>The risks associated with illegal connections are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The illegal wires are usually not connected to an earth leakage unit which will “trip” or break the current if somebody touches a live wire • The insulation around these live wires conducting the electricity is usually insufficient to protect the person touching the wires from getting shocked. If one combines this with the lack of earth leakage, then there is a very dangerous situation. Many people are shocked or killed in this way every year • The bare wires are often touching other metal objects in/around the house (such as fences, downpipes, metal objects), which means that large structures or objects are live – and without earth leakage protection – and has in many cases resulted in tragic consequences when members of the public have made contact with the live structures and have been seriously injured or died. • The saddest part is that it is often the people (even children or toddlers) who have nothing to do with these illegal connections who are hurt or killed. <p>It is also important to understand that “seriously injured” means that people can be badly burnt or lose part of an arm or a leg, or even the entire limb.</p>
<p>What are safety precautions that can be taken?</p>	<p>There are a number of safety precautions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report any illegal connections to the Eskom share call number (086 00 ESKOM or 086 00 37566) and give the specific location. - Warn people about the illegal connection and ask everyone to stay clear of the wires, and don't touch anything near these wires • Make sure that you use only registered electricians to work on the electrical wiring and equipment in your home. Only Eskom employees or Eskom contractors may perform work on the

	Eskom network and on Eskom equipment.
<p>Are Eskom staff being harassed or attacked when they go into communities?</p>	<p>For a few years now we have been documenting hostility towards Eskom workers going into communities. However, the last few months have been very worrying for us as this hostility has become violent – as seen in the Western Cape recently.</p> <p>Communities feel the need to protect the connections that are done illegally and when they see Eskom vehicles entering their neighbourhoods, they attack our employees and create environments where we need security services to get involved. We understand that cutting illegal connections may appear harsh but the reality of it is that this is very necessary. It is necessary for the safety of children and others, as well as the protection of transformers and min-subs that could blow up and lead to lengthy power outages.</p> <p>We can't do our job if our employees become targets of violence and it becomes costly to do so because of additional security measures.</p> <p>In the end we all want the same thing – a South Africa that works for all its people. We cannot be working against each other. We appeal to communities to help us curb the aggression and violence that Eskom employees are subjected to. Rather help us by becoming part of the solution that works for everyone. At the end of the day we also have families who are waiting for us at home after a day at work like everyone else.</p>