

Energy

BULLETIN

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SPECIAL EDITION OF THE ENERGY BULLETIN

DRAFT GUIDELINES ISSUED FOR ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION WORK

Readers will no doubt be aware from articles in earlier Energy Bulletins that the Office of Energy has been endeavouring for some considerable time to develop suitable supply regulations under the *Electricity Act 1945*.

The purpose of these regulations is to protect the community, by ensuring the safety of electricity supply systems and by ensuring consumers receive supplies that meet appropriate standards of quality, reliability and metering accuracy.

Negotiations with the electricity suppliers on the proposed *Electricity Supply Regulations* have been going on for some 2.5 years, without success. More recently the Chamber of Minerals & Energy, representing the suppliers' interests, proposed a further working party for developing the *Electricity Supply Regulations*. The Minister for Energy has agreed to this further effort. However, as the Electricity Supply Association of Australia and electrical regulators represented by ERAC (Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council) have agreed in recent days to produce a national ESI safety code, the design of regulations for WA will need to await the national code, expected to be available mid 1999. The preparation of regulations by the working party will then probably require a further 6 months.

I am concerned about the delay with regard to the *Electricity Supply Regulations*. As Director of Energy Safety I have therefore decided in the meantime to exercise the powers provided under section 33AA of the *Electricity Act 1945*, to issue a set of "Guidelines for Electricity Transmission and Distribution Work". Although this is a measure well short of regulations, the Guidelines will provide useful guidance about acceptable safe work practices in the electricity supply industry.

This special edition of the Energy Bulletin further describes the rationale behind the publication of the Guidelines and details them in the form of a draft for comment. Some obligations about accident reporting are also discussed.

Your comments are invited



ALBERT KOENIG
DIRECTOR OF ENERGY SAFETY

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BACKGROUND TO GUIDELINES FOR THE ESI

Introduction

1 January 1995 heralded the cessation of SECWA and the commencement of Western Power and AlintaGas. The Office of Energy (OOE), the Government's new energy policy and regulatory agency, also commenced operation at that time. It was the beginning of serious competition between energy suppliers in this State.

The technical and safety regulatory framework inherited by the OOE from SECWA was sufficient for dealing with electricity and gas consumer installation and appliance safety issues (eg. via licensing, inspections and mandated technical standards).

However, it is seriously deficient for regulating electricity and gas supply system safety and supply standards, a situation that had understandably not been addressed during the SECWA era. There were no statutory technical and safety obligations for the energy supply industry in WA, for the purpose of:

- ensuring the safety of the public, consumers and energy workers in the vicinity of energy supply assets (eg. high voltage lines, cables, substations and gas distribution pipelines, pressure regulators etc.), and
- ensuring that consumers receive energy supplies at acceptable standards of quality (eg. voltage or pressure, so that appliances will function correctly and safely), reliability and metering accuracy.

In an industry where corporatised Government-owned and private energy suppliers (referred to in this context as "network operators") are operating in an increasingly competitive way, there will inevitably be financial pressures to cut corners. Plans for further industry reform including the possibility of privatisation

strengthen the need for such community protection.

The OOE has therefore been endeavouring to develop suitable regulations under the *Electricity Act 1945* and the *Gas Standards Act 1972*. Unfortunately the efforts of the OOE during the last 2.5 years have not delivered anything useful with respect to electricity supply.

Publication of Guidelines

The Guidelines for electricity supply work will partially cover the present gap in the regulatory framework, while further work on the regulations hopefully proceeds to a useful outcome.

A draft version of the Guidelines is contained in this special edition of the *Energy Bulletin*, for the information of industry. The Guidelines will apply to all electricity network operators (supply authorities and independent power producers) and will be reviewed once regulations are ready to be promulgated.

The Guidelines are about safe work practices. They are modelled on a Code produced last year by the Electricity Association of NSW for that State's electricity supply industry (where the Code has mandatory application, by regulation).

The Guidelines are however not a substitute for regulations, as they:

- do not create any formal or statutory obligations for network operators, and
- cannot deal with supply quality, reliability and metering issues, so these are not covered.

As is covered in more detail in the opening sections of the Guidelines, they may be taken as evidence of the standards and procedures which normally ought to be applied when planning and carrying out electrical work, to achieve an acceptable level of electrical safety for consumers, the

public and industry workers, contractors and their employees.

Comments

The Guidelines are being published initially in draft form to enable interested parties to submit written comments on the content of the draft guidelines, which must reach Mr Terry Corfield, Principal Engineer Electricity Supply of this Office by close of business 2 December 1998 [please use fax no. (08) 9422 5244].

Shortly thereafter that the Guidelines will be finalised and issued. If you are unable to meet the above date but wish to make comments, please submit them so they may be considered for incorporation into future editions of the Guidelines.

Please note that some publications (other than Australian Standards) referred to in the Guidelines may not be readily available for purchase. If difficulty is being experienced, please contact Mr Corfield on (08) 9422 5286.

The Final Guidelines

Copies of the Guidelines will be made available from the OOE. Complimentary copies will automatically be forwarded to electricity supply authorities. Other persons may have a complimentary copy forwarded to them via mail, by advising their request (with address details) by fax to the OOE (Attention: Mr T Corfield) on (08) 9422 5244.

National Standards

In October 1998 a National Forum on Technical and Safety Standards for the Electricity Supply Industry (ESI), hosted by Standards Australia, was held in Sydney. The Forum was conducted in response to a request from the Australia - New Zealand Joint Electrotechnology Standards Policy Board (JESPB) to assess whether the ESI (including regulators) needed further work carried out in respect of technical and safety standards.

Present at the meeting were representatives of:

- the Electricity Supply Association of Australia (ESAA),
- the Electricity Association of NSW,
- some individual east coast electricity supply businesses,
- the Australian Electrical & Electronics Manufacturers' Association (AEEMA),
- the Association of Consulting Engineers Australia (ACEA),
- the Electrical Regulatory Authorities Council (ERAC), and
- Standards Australia.

The Forum agreed to the development of a national Code of Practice for ESI safety (covering all aspects of transmission and distribution design, construction, asset maintenance and operation) by ESAA, under a steering committee of ESAA and ERAC members, with completion scheduled for mid 1999.

On completion of the national Code it will be available for all States/Territories to pick up in their local legislation, if desired. This is expected to be the case in WA, through the efforts of the working party mentioned in the lead article. The WA *Electricity Supply Regulations* will also deal with supply standards.

The Standards Australia Forum concluded that the urgent work for the national ESI Code should be completed, after which Standards Australia would give consideration to converting it to an Australian Standard as well as to develop a suite of supporting standards.

Electrical Accidents

Attention is also drawn to the requirement that all electrical accidents must be reported as set out in regulation 63 of the *Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991*.

It has become evident that some persons, including some network operators, are not complying with this requirement. Industry is advised that this regulation must be complied with and organisational arrangements should be made as necessary.

In addition, personnel should be made aware that regulation 63A of the *Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991* states that a person shall not do anything to hinder or obstruct an accident investigation.

Accident Reports to the OOE should be made via the OOE's freecall (24 hour) number 1800 678 198. Any queries on accident reporting should be directed to the OOE's Electrical Inspection Branch on (08) 9422 5261, during office hours.

The detail of both regulations is included as an Appendix to this publication, for information purposes only.

APPENDIX - ELECTRICAL ACCIDENTS

The following are extracts from the *Electricity (Licensing) Regulations 1991*.

Accidents to be reported

- 63 (1) Where an accident that has caused or is likely to cause danger to life or property has occurred any person who is aware of the accident or danger shall immediately report the fact to the Director and the relevant supply authority but if the person is an electrical worker in the course of his or her employment it is sufficient for the purposes of this regulation if the report is made to the employer of that person.
- (2) Any report made to an employer under subregulation (1) shall be reported to the relevant supply authority and Director.
- (3) In subregulation (1) —
“accident” means an accident that results from a sudden discharge of electricity or that otherwise has, or may have, electrical origins.

Interference with scene of accident

- 63A. A person shall not do anything at the place at which an accident referred to in regulation 63 occurs with the intention of hindering or obstructing an investigation of the accident by an inspector or police officer.