

Electrical Safety First Briefing

Best Practice Framework Proposals: Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances

Electrical Safety First is the only UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and fires caused by domestic electrical accidents: www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

Electrical Safety First welcomes the consultation on the code of practice for vulnerable customers and the consideration of safety within it. However, whilst the consultation refers to the inclusion of a free gas safety checks for vulnerable customers in Measure 5.4, electrical safety is omitted.

Electrical safety is of particular importance for vulnerable people, who face higher risks in the event of fires in their homes, and electricity is a leading cause of domestic fires in Northern Ireland. Therefore, Electrical Safety First believes that the code of practice for vulnerable people should be widened to include a free electrical safety check offered by electricity providers. This can help save lives.

Electrical safety should be a top priority

- Electrical safety should be a primary concern, as electricity accounts for around 58% of accidental home fires in Northern Ireland.ⁱ
- People aged 60 and over are more likely to die in an electrical fire than any other demographic, especially when living alone. The risk is heightened further by a health condition such as dementia or Parkinson's.
- Vulnerable customers should be offered a free electrical safety check on a five-yearly basis, at an estimated cost of £165 per check, so £33 per year. A gas safety check, which is currently offered free of charge, on an annual basis, costs around £80.ⁱⁱ

We should not discriminate by tenure

- The owner-occupied sector is the largest tenure in Northern Ireland with 63% of homes, yet it has limited electrical safety standards, with no requirement for regular electrical safety checks.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Electrical safety checks mandated by the Private Tenancies Act 2022 will soon benefit vulnerable people living in the private rented sector. Regular electrical checks are also recommended for the social rented sector. This leaves vulnerable homeowners who cannot afford to pay for an electrical safety check at particular risk.
- The sector carries an elevated risk, particularly as most properties in the sector were built before 1980 (58%), resulting in potentially ageing electrical installations in a poorer state of repair.^{iv}
- The tenure category also has a high proportion of older people, with those aged 60 and over more likely to live in owner-occupied homes, with 77% of those aged 60-74, and 81% of those aged 75 and over living in this category.^v
- Living in older properties, with unchecked electrical systems poses a heightened risk to these vulnerable groups.

The cost-of-living crisis is worsening the situation

- The ongoing cost-of-living crisis means that record numbers of people are struggling to make ends meet. The impact will inevitably be felt more by older and vulnerable people, particularly when using energy in the home.
- While some older people may be asset-rich as they are homeowners, they will often be cash-poor. During the current cost-of-living crisis, many will be pushed into fuel poverty.

Electrical Safety checks can assist the transition to net zero

- Northern Ireland has set targets for achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, necessitating the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels in homes and a greater reliance on electricity.
- Electrical safety checks can help determine the preparedness of homes before they move to a greater reliance on electricity, ensuring a safe transition.
- As this transition happens, electrical safety checks will become increasingly important, and the need for gas safety checks will reduce, meaning that resources can be reallocated towards electrical safety checks.

Electrical Safety First firmly believes that offering electrical safety checks to vulnerable customers can provide vital protection against electrical safety risks and ultimately save lives. We are calling for a similar expansion of the Priority Services Register in Great Britain to include the same provisions for electrical safety checks. Northern Ireland has a unique opportunity through this consultation to implement these changes now.

Contact Details:

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- ⁱ <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/northern-ireland/statistics-northern-ireland/>
 - ⁱⁱ <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/gas-safety-certificate-cost/>
 - ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/working-with-us/research/house-condition-survey>
 - ^{iv} <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/working-with-us/research/house-condition-survey>
 - ^v <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/working-with-us/research/house-condition-survey>