Electrical safety switch FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

A NSW Government campaign is asking consumers to have electrical safety switches installed in their homes. This campaign responds to people dying from house fires and faulty electrical wiring in homes in NSW.

Please learn about why it is important to have safety switches installed in your home with this information.

What is a safety switch?

A safety switch is an electrical device (see image) that will switch off the electricity in your home immediately if an electrical fault is detected. You will find it in your switchboard (usually outside a house. In a unit, it might be in your hallway, kitchen, linen cupboard or in a shared area, such as a 'common property' garage or power room).

Safety switches look slightly different on each switchboard but always have a **'T'** or **'Test'** button.

Why should I install a safety switch in my home?

If you have a safety switch installed, it can protect you, your family and your home from deadly electric shock and electrical fire. The switch works by turning off electricity straight away if it finds an electrical fault. A safety switch can only protect you if it is on the circuit where there is a fault.

How many safety switches do I need?

To be fully protected, you may need more than one safety switch so each circuit in your home has a switch. For example, you may need one safety switch for your ceiling lights and another safety switch for your appliances (washing machine, oven) that are on a different circuit. If you are unsure your home has safety switches, contact a licensed electrician and ask them to check your switchboard.

Have electrical faults caused problems, such as fires, recently?

Yes, electrical fires are common. Each year, around 40% of the 4,500 home fires in NSW are caused by electrical faults and appliances. Electrical fires may be prevented by getting the electrical wiring in your home checked and having safety switches installed by a licensed electrician.

Do I need to check my safety switch at home?

Yes, safety switches should be checked twice a year to make sure they are working properly. It takes minutes to check a safety switch and it could save a life! Please do this:

1. **Tell everyone at home** you are about to test the safety switches, and that this will cut the electricity supply (during the test only).
2. Go to your switchboard. **Press the 'T' or 'Test' button on the safety switch you are testing**. This should cause the switch to move to the 'off' position and stop the electricity supply inside your house straight away.
3. **Check inside your home** – there should be no power to lights and appliances on the circuit being tested.
4. **Reset the safety switch you've tested** by lifting or turning the switch back to the 'on' position. The power should be back on inside your home on the circuit you tested.

You can also visit nsw.gov.au and search 'Safety switches protect you' to watch our step-by-step video.

What happens if the safety switch isn't working?

If your safety switch doesn't move to the 'off' position after pressing the **'T'** or **'Test'** button it is not working. You, your family and your home are not protected. Contact a licensed electrician to repair it or have a new safety switch installed.

How can I install a safety switch in my home?

Only a licensed electrician can legally install a safety switch in your home. A simple installation may cost you a few hundred dollars. For everyone's safety, always use a licensed electrician for all your electrical work.

How can I check if the electrician is licensed?

It is easy and free to check if an electrician has a current licence:

1. Ask for their full name or their Australian Business Number (ABN).
1. Enter these details online at onegov.nsw.gov.au/publicregister/#/publicregister/search/Trades

For everyone's safety, always use a licensed electrician for all electrical work. Ask for a uniquely numbered Certificate of Compliance for Electrical Work once the job is done.

Who is responsible for installing and testing safety switches in a rental property?

Landlords are responsible for installing and checking safety switches in their property. During the tenancy, safety switches should be tested twice yearly as best practice.

Landlords / property agents can do this as part of regular property inspections and can do it when they also test smoke alarms. They should let tenants know they are going to do this test when they give the notice of a property inspection or maintenance visit. They can let tenants know why the test is being done, and that it will cut the electricity supply during the test only.

If a safety switch finds an electrical fault during a tenancy, repairing the fault is an urgent repair. You should ask your landlord to have electrical faults repaired immediately.

If your rental property doesn't have safety switches, ask your landlord or managing agent to have them installed by a licensed electrician.

Where can I find more information about electrical safety?

For more information visit: nsw.gov.au/topics/electrical-safety/in-the-home