

Electrical Inspection

Frequently Asked Questions

Q) Why do I need to have my wiring tested?

A) Electricity will always find the easiest path to earth. Any faults or weaknesses within your electrical installation or portable appliances can go undetected. In the event of another fault developing, this could lead to serious risk of fire, electrocution or death. For example, a 13 amp ring-main without earth continuity could render all metal parts of appliances plugged into it "LIVE" if one item on the ring developed a fault to earth. Fixed wiring testing will accurately identify faults, their locations and usually the recommended solution.

Q) Will testing cause a lot of disruption to the power?

A) A short power outage can be expected on each circuit within the system but because most of the testing is carried out whilst the system is still live, these outages can be planned around your daily activities.

Q) Is electrical installation testing a legal requirement?

A) The law does not require electrical testing to be carried out. However, the law does require that you keep your entire electrical system safe at all times. The only effective means to that end is to have periodic testing and inspection carried out, together with action to remedy any faults found as a result of testing. If an accident or fire does occur where electricity is suspected to have been the cause, then the duty is yours to prove that you did your best to avoid that accident (offence). Test data results together with preventative maintenance records will provide your best proof and defence.

Q) Is electrical testing a requirement of my insurance company?

A) Increasingly, insurers are insisting that inspection and testing be carried out on a regular basis. If you are found guilty of suffering an avoidable accident you will have committed a criminal offence. Insurers will not pay fines or compensation suffered resulting from a criminal offence.

Q) My insurers have recently carried out a site survey and they didn't ask me to have electrical testing carried out.

A) A visiting inspector will not necessarily identify the need to maintain electrical safety at every inspection he makes, especially if there are other issues to be addressed. Because testing has not been specifically demanded does not mean that the legal requirements to comply with electrical safety do not apply.

Q) Why have I not needed to have testing carried out before?

A) There has always been a requirement to satisfy Health & Safety legislation. In 1989 The Electricity at Work Regulations came into force, which clarifies the need to maintain electrical

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systems safely. So there has always been the need and test data results will form a major part of your defence should an accident occur which leads to prosecution.

Q) I rent my business premises, is testing my landlords responsibility or mine?

A) You are responsible to make sure that you and your staff comply with Health & Safety legislation. However, it is usually dependant on the terms of your lease as to whether you or your landlord pays for testing to be carried out on the electrical installation. Usually, if you are on a full repairing lease then the cost will fall to you. Portable Appliance testing will always be at your expense.

Q) I have been told that I only need to have a percentage of the system tested in order to comply.

A) As per the IEE Regulations, you can only rely on sample testing if you hold previous full system records, the installation is considered to be in excellent condition, no faults are found during sample testing and no undocumented alterations have been carried out since the system was new or last tested. This does not hold true for the vast majority, for which full inspection and testing should be undertaken.

Q) I have been told that Thermal Imaging is sufficient and I don't need a full Inspection and Test of my electrical installation.

A) No, definitely not. Thermal Imaging Photography is an excellent interim maintenance option for identifying hot spots in connections, fuses, motor bearing, conveyors etc. and can help prevent costly breakdowns and fires in some cases. Thermal Imaging cannot take into account damaged equipment, lack of earthing, over fusing, excessive cable runs, volt drop, potential fuse disconnection time failures and a number of other potential faults. So full periodic inspection and testing should form part of any maintenance regime.

Q) Can I carry out portable appliance testing in-house?

A) Yes, provided you have the right test equipment and suitably competent and trained staff who can carry out the work. In practice, experience has shown that even with suitably competent staff that in practice time is an issue and PAT testing often gets left at the back of the "to-do" list. It is usually also not cost efficient to undertake PAT testing in house when you consider the cost of contracting out versus the cost of utilising in-house staff who are often pulled off such tasks to attend breakdowns. Do the sums.

Q) What will happen if I don't have testing carried out?

A) Unless and until you suffer an accident then probably nothing will happen. However, remember that maintenance of a safe electrical system is a legal requirement. Therefore a preventable accident could lead to prosecution, for which there will be no insurance cover. You may also find that an insurance loss adjuster could make much of the fact that you may not have maintained the system adequately which could have led to the claim. Again, this could lead to an unsuccessful claim and a costly experience.

Q) I run a small business; do I need to have my portable appliances tested?

A) The Electricity at Work Regulations applies to all businesses from multi-nationals to sole traders. So you still need to comply.

Q) I am afraid that my electrical installation is quite old; won't testing open a can of worms in terms of remedial work costs?

A) The majority of problems found involve earthing deficiencies, which although potentially very dangerous are not usually hugely expensive to remedy.

Q) How often should my electrical installation be tested?

A) The IEE guidance suggests the following test intervals:

Domestic	10 years
Commercial	5 year
Industrial	3 years

Q) How often should my portable appliances be tested?

A) The results of previous tests should be considered in a programme of risk assessment. In the absence of such history then the following intervals may be considered as a guide. But remember that other factors such as the ability of site staff to identify any potential faults or damage and take suitable action. Mechanical damage and abuse must also be taken into consideration:

Low-risk	24 monthly or more
Medium risk	12 monthly
High risk	6 monthly (workshop)
Very high risk	3 monthly (site equipment)