

COCA WCB Update #379 November 2, 2007

Council of Construction Associations

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COCA Successful on GFCI Issue

COCA is very pleased to report that discussions with the BC Safety Authority and WorkSafeBC have resulted in a solution to the GFCI issue that had been causing major problems for the Construction Industry.

Background

In a document distributed on April 13, 2007, WorkSafeBC served notice that GFCIs must be in place for construction or demolition activities that are outdoors or in damp or wet conditions.

WorkSafeBC had previously accepted an Assured Grounding Program as “another acceptable means of protection” under its Regulation 19.15.

The new practice from WorkSafeBC is the result of a change to the Canadian Electrical Code, Part 1, which was revised to take effect in 2007. The BC electrical Safety Regulation adopts this regulation for British Columbia.

COCA expressed its major concerns about the change to only accept GFCI’s and to no longer accept Assured Grounding programs.

Specifically,

1. The Workers’ Compensation Act requires that there be public hearings before a Regulation can be changed. WorkSafeBC policy requires public hearings before a Regulation can be changed.

There have been no public hearings and no consultation prior to the change

to eliminate Assured Grounding as an option.

2. There are serious questions about whether or not GFCIs themselves create a hazard. There have been numerous reports of GFCIs repeatedly tripping or stopping the electrical equipment – saws, drills, etc.
3. GFCIs may be damaged and they may not work – even though they look like they work. This itself may create a hazard. Workers may also damage them, out of frustration because of numerous false cutouts.
4. We are aware of no injuries that have resulted from the use of an Assured Grounding program – when in place.

The Solution

COCA's concerns have been heard and the BC Safety Authority, which is responsible for the electrical safety code in BC, has responded with a Variance program, at no cost.

To satisfy the requirement, and not use GFCIs, the Contractor must:

1. Have an acceptable Assured Grounding Program in place throughout the site.
2. Submit the Variance Application to the same organization where the electrical permit is obtained.
3. Post the Variance Application and the Assured Grounding Program. Begin work.

As conditions of the variance, a copy of the approved assured grounding program must be posted at the job site with the electrical permit, and all workers on site must follow the posted assured grounding program.

The following documents are attached to this newsletter to assist the Contractor:

1. The BCSA notice on GFCIs and Assured Grounding.
2. The BCSA Variance Application.
3. A sample Ledcor Assured Grounding Program, which meets the WorkSafeBC standard.

Note:

** COCA is also working with the BC Safety Authority on a permanent solution in order to change the national electrical regulation so that Assured Grounding is accepted without the need for a Variance. Until this is done, the Variance process will need to be done.

** Individual municipalities may also enforce the national electrical code. If you encounter difficulties, please call Grant McMillan of COCA at 604-241-7667.