

Council of Construction Associations

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COCA Teams Up with WorkSafeBC to Resolve GFCI Issue!

A problem for contractors created by changes to the Canadian electrical Code (Federal Jurisdiction) has been overcome by the actions of COCA working together with WorkSafeBC (WSBC). (COCA represents 17 construction associations and lobbies on behalf of the Construction Industry with respect to WorkSafeBC issues.

Grant McMillan of COCA has been working with WorkSafeBC and a strong committee from the Construction Industry – Hank Paquin, Graham Trafford of Mott Electric and John Russell representing Bosa Construction.

WorkSafeBC has announced that the Notice of Project (Construction) -- (NOPC) form has been modified to facilitate the use of an Assured Grounding Program (AGP) in lieu of Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI) on construction and demolition sites.

Process to be Followed for Using AGP

The new NOP(C) includes an electrical declaration for each project.

This enables the submitter to inform WorkSafeBC of their intention to seek a variance from the electrical authorities having jurisdiction (AHJ) so that an AGP can be utilized in lieu of GFCI.

The NOPC declaration will require the submitter to declare whether GFCI will be used or application to the electrical AHJ for variance to use AGP will be made.

A copy of the NOPC declaration that has been submitted to WorkSafeBC can then be included by an applicant with any variance application to the electrical AHJ. This will assure the AHJ that WorkSafeBC is aware of the declared practice at that work site.

The updated NOPC form is available on the WorkSafeBC website www.worksafebc.com as of September 20, 2008. Just click on the Forms tab.

Note: For a short interim period, there may be circumstances where an employer has submitted an NOPC prior to September 20, or otherwise has used the old form, and now determines that they need to provide the electrical declaration. **This should not be done by submitting a new NOPC to WorkSafeBC.**

The submitter should send the electrical declaration wording in a letter, together with the pre-existing NOPC number for cross-reference, to WorkSafeBC. Please fax, mail or e-mail the letter to WorkSafeBC Prevention Support Services, PO Box 5350 Stn Terminal, Vancouver BC V6B 5L5, Fax 604-276-3247, e-mail Prevnop@worksafebc.com.

Support Services will keep the original letter with the pre-existing NOPC and send a copy of the letter to the appropriate WorkSafeBC regional office. Any questions about this procedure should be directed to Support Services.

Brief History

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.

The WorkSafeBC Regulation has been changed in a significant way as a result of the change to the Canadian Electrical Code. The wording of the Regulation, as shown below, had previously required GFCIs “unless another

means of protection is provided.” The April 13, 2007 WorkSafeBC notice stipulates that “another means of protection” (i.e. Assured Grounding) is no longer permitted.

The WorkSafeBC Occupational Health & Safety Regulation requires that portable electrical equipment used outdoors or in a wet or damp location be protected by approved GFCI unless another acceptable means of protection is provided. The Regulation reads:

19.15 Ground fault circuit interrupters

(1) When used outdoors or in a wet or damp location, portable electrical equipment, including temporary lighting, must be protected by an approved ground fault circuit interrupter of the class A type installed at the receptacle or on the circuit at the panel, unless another acceptable means of protection is provided.

(2) A ground fault circuit interrupter must not be used in place of grounding except as permitted by the *Electrical Safety Act* and the regulations made under it.

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.

The Code currently states:

“76-014 Receptacles

15A and 20A receptacles installed to provide power for buildings or projects under construction or demolition shall be protected by ground fault circuit interrupters of the Class A type.”

COCA Reasons for Supporting Assured Grounding Program as an Alternative

The new requirement within the Canadian Electrical Code presents several major problems in both process and effect.

1. 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.

When the GFCI is triggered, the worker must stop work and travel to the panel to reset the GFCI. This frequently means climbing up and down ladders. As frustration builds from repeated power outages, the worker may become frustrated, lose focus, and fall.

When the GFCI is triggered, it may be when the saw, drill or other tool is embedded in wood, concrete or brick. Freeing up the power tool then presents new safety hazards.

2. GFCIs may be damaged and they may not work – even though they look like they work. Workers may also damage them, out of frustration because of numerous false cutouts. These problems do not exist with the use of a proper Assured Grounding Program.

3. We are not aware of any injuries that have resulted from the use of a proper Assured Grounding Program – when in place.