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Buying the right water heaters

THE Institution of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) is gravely concerned over the death of the Korean university student who is believed to have been electrocuted while having a hot shower in a bathroom of her family home in Seremban a few days ago.

This is a matter of grave concern for the IEM because similar incidents have happened in the past few years.

Currently, IEM is unable to verify the actual reasons for the electrocution as the available information is not sufficient to conclude the causes of the accident.

However, the electrocution may occur due to equipment failure and subsequently the unavailability or defective electric shock safety protection consisting of residual current devices (RCD) and earthing to protect the water heater system.

The Electricity Regulations 1994 specifically require residential installation to be mandatorily installed with appropriately rated RCD and earthing based on its

use. The purpose of the RCD is to detect any dangerous leakage of current caused by defective equipment. Hence, the correct installation and maintenance of RCD and earthing is critical to ensure the safety of consumers.

In 2014, the Energy Commission (Suruhanjaya Tenaga) issued a circular which is concurrent with the Electricity Regulations 1994 to urge developers to practise the correct use of the RCD especially for the water heater equipment. All power supply to the water heater equipment or wet areas has to be mandatorily equipped with a RCD with a sensitivity of less than or equal to 10mA. This information is in the Energy Commission's (EC) website.

In addition, the Electricity Regulations 1994 (Amendment 2013) enables the EC to regulate electrical equipment in line with safety requirements as well as to safeguard consumers' interests. Thirty-four types of electrical equipment are being regulated

and one of these is the water heater. These regulated electrical equipment are to be tested to the specified standards to fulfil the safety requirements.

Consumers are also advised to only purchase water heaters with the SIRIM-ST approval stickers.

IEM, via its Electrical Engineering Technical Division, together with other related associations and stakeholders such as the Electrical and Electronic Association of Malaysia (TEEAM), is currently assisting the EC to formulate a code of practice for installation and maintenance of water heaters. With this code, which is in the final stages of formulation, IEM hopes to work with the EC and TEEAM to create awareness of the importance of the proper design, installation and use of water heater to consumers.

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