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HEAT ON danger shower

HAZARD AT HOME: Energy Commission to enforce 19-year-old law on safety measures for water heaters

- 80 per cent of Malaysians unaware of potential risks
- Offenders could be slapped with RM5,000 fine
- Agency mulling house checks

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Regulation to come into effect after 19 years

FEARS: Dangers came to light following death of Japanese couple believed to have been electrocuted in bathroom

BALQIS LIM AND THARANYA ARUMUGAM

HOUSEHOLDS that fail to install additional safety measures for their water heaters could be in for a shock.

To protect consumers, the Energy Commission is set to enforce the Electricity Regulation 1994, clause 36(2), a regulation that first came into effect 19 years ago.

Under this regulation, households that fail to install an additional residual-current circuit breaker (RCCB) for water heaters could be fined a maximum of RM5,000.

The regulation, however, is set to be enforced only now, following fresh fears that millions of consumers could be dicing with death daily because of a lack of safety measures in place.

The dangers of being electrocuted came to light recently following the deaths of a Japanese couple, who were believed to have been electrocuted to death in the bath-

room of their Mont Kiara home on Sept 9.

To underscore its seriousness, the Energy Commission is mulling conducting door-to-door checks to ensure all households comply with the regulation.

Its department of electrical safety regulation director, Abdul Rahim Ibrahim, said households must ensure that their water heaters were installed with an additional RCCB, which has a sensitivity level of 10 milliamperes (mA).

The ampere rating specifies the amount of current that can be emitted from an electrical device. The higher the mA count is, more electrical current will be transmitted.

He said previously, the main household RCCB, used as a protection against current leakage, had a 500mA sensitivity level.

"However, a RCCB with a 500mA

level isn't safe enough to protect human life. This is because a current leakage of more than 100mA is enough to result in death," he said.

As such, in 1994, the government had gazetted the Electricity Regulation 1994, which falls under the Electricity Supply Act 1990.

One of the clauses in the regulation requires that the main RCCB sensitivity level be capped at 100mA; 30mA for handheld electrical devices; and 10mA for water heaters.

Explaining the delay in enforcing the regulation, Rahim said when the regulations came into force in 1994, the 100mA RCCB was not yet widely available in the market.

"It only became more widely used after several years, in new housing projects and in rewiring works."

He said that the regulation compels contractors to install RC-

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CBs according to the specifications.

In 2006, the commission issued an Electrical Installations of Buildings handbook for electricians, installers, and contractors specifying the regulations. This was followed by a circular in 2008, and in 2011 as a reminder.

Failure to comply could lead to legal action.

“We believe that we have given all parties enough time to comply with these regulations.”

Abdul Rahim said the commission now has to enforce the regulations for the safety of consumers.

He said the commission is look-

ing into heavier measures to ensure compliance.

“We are in the midst of discussing possible enforcement measures. This includes the possibility of sending officers to check door-to-door.”

He said Malaysian households should start looking for registered electricians or contractors to install the RCCB, as it would soon start enforcing the law.

He said the list of registered electrical contractors and their contact details can be obtained from the Energy Commission’s portal at <http://www.st.gov.my>.

“It is advisable to have the installations done by these registered

contractors rather than risk being electrocuted due to poor installation by non-registered contractors.” **Additional reporting by Norbaiti Phaharoradzi**

AROUND 80 per cent of Malaysian consumers are unaware of the need to install additional residual-current circuit breaker (RCCB) in their households. The few who are aware, said the Electrical and Electronics Association of Malaysia (TEEM), balk at the cost involved, inadvertently placing their lives at risk.

→ For full story, visit: www.nst.com.my

Past water heater fatalities

INFOGRAPHIC: NST

Sept 9, 2013 • A Japanese couple were found dead, believed to have been electrocuted in the bathroom of their apartment in Mont Kiara here, because of a short circuit in the water heater.

Dec 23, 2011 • A mobile telecommunications shop owner, Tye Chuan Sin, 40, was electrocuted while taking a shower at his home in Bukit Gambier, George Town, Penang. He was killed after he came into contact with the malfunctioning water heater. His wife found his naked body with visible scalding marks across his chest and around his neck at their three-storey terrace house.

Oct 6, 2004 • A couple, Lim Kuan Soon, 50, and Chin Yoke Lan, 40, were electrocuted in the bathroom of their home in Taman Sri Gombak, Kuala Lumpur. Chin rushed home after being informed by her daughter that she could not enter the bathroom and that there had been no response from her father, who had earlier gone for a shower. Chin forced open the door and found her husband on the floor. In trying to revive him, she, too, was electrocuted.

July 27, 1992 • Malaysia Building Society manager Teoh Kim Theam, 54, was electrocuted while trying to fix some wiring for a water heater on the rooftop of his house in Jalan SS3/8, Petaling Jaya.

July 10, 1992 • Two brothers, air-conditioning technicians Loh Thiam Weng, 29, and Thiam Hee, 17, were electrocuted in their home in Taman Soon Tat, Balakong, Kajang. Thiam Hee died after a short circuit in the water heater. Thiam Weng, who went to his brother’s aid after hearing a loud noise, also died at the scene.

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