

# electrician



Electricity can be scary stuff, especially in the wrong hands. It is therefore very important to choose the right person to do your wiring.

A good place to start is with the Electrical Contractors' Association of New Zealand (ECANZ). In Australia, for more information, contact your local provider. ECANZ members are Master Electricians who all meet strict safety standards and commercial criteria. Using them also means work carried out is covered by the Master Electricians free guarantee, which means that if a problem relating to the quality of workmanship or safety arises, ECANZ will remedy defects up to a value of \$10,000 if your original ECANZ contractor will not.

As a homeowner, you are permitted to undertake some electrical work in your home under certain conditions. A like-for-like replacement of a three point pin, plug, for example, is fairly straightforward, but anything more can be complex and dangerous. For example, you may do things

like replace switches, sockets, light fittings, thermostats and elements, and repair light fittings and appliances. You can also disconnect and relocate permanently wired appliances and relocate existing switches, socket outlets, and lighting outlets that are supplied with electricity by tough-plastic-sheathed cables. However, ECANZ says the vast majority of householders would not be competent to carry out many such activities, and nor would they feel confident enough to put their family and property in danger.

A homeowner may also install, extend or alter any cable (except the main cables that come in from the street), but the work must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the New Zealand standard ECP 51, and must be checked and tested by a licensed electrical inspector. You cannot connect your work to the electricity

## dodgy DIYers

### power play

It all happened about five months ago. We own a beach house over at Kawhia and needed to have the trees cut near the road, just in case they fell and caused damage. Instead of hiring a professional to do the job, my husband decided to take it on, with a German friend of his. They went there for the weekend to do it, but before they even attempted to trim or cut the trees they thought that they deserved a beer.

While intoxicated, the German climbed the ladder to cut some branches, while my husband waited on the ground to navigate and stop them landing on the road (the main road into Kawhia, in fact!) They were on a roll until both made a mistake. They cut a branch and let it land on a powerline. The line snapped and was flashing around throwing sparks everywhere. My husband was in shock and seeing his life flash before his eyes and the German was swearing in his native language.

Because these powerlines are the ones that run into the township, it cut off the power into Kawhia for four hours, until they were repaired. We had to pay the \$800 fee for the call-out and equipment. It was a costly lesson that it is sometimes best to call in the professionals rather than doing it yourself.

*From: Lynn MacDonald*

### power cut

My husband (how many funny DIY stories start like that?) was changing a light fitting outside and had to drill some new holes for the fitting. While up the ladder with his electric drill, he decided to be cautious, climbed down and told me he was going to turn off the power as he would be drilling close to the wiring. (Remember, the drill was ELECTRIC!).

*From: Stuart Family*

supply yourself. The inspector will connect it, test it, and issue you with a Certificate of Compliance (COC) if it meets safety requirements. And you are not allowed to do any work on a switchboard – apart from replacing fuse wire or fuse cartridges – yourself.

There is an inherent danger when dealing with electricity. Mistakes can result in shocks or fire. Doing it yourself can also impact on your insurance when time comes for a claim. So, if you're game to try, ensure you have the necessary knowledge and skills... and that the power is turned off. However, it's safest to get someone in who knows what they're doing.

When choosing an electrician, ensure they are registered and have a current practising license. They should be able to present an ID card issued by the Electrical Workers Registration Board, bearing their name, registration number and license expiry date.

## Doing it yourself can also impact on your insurance when time comes for a claim.

As with most such jobs, get three quotes, but be aware that the cheapest may not be the best. Ask for an itemised quote, which lists materials and labour costs. This is helpful if changes are made to the job while it's in progress. Some people buy the necessary parts from their local hardware store and then call an electrician in to install them. If you do this, your electrician is likely to up their hourly rate, as they make a margin on products they source themselves. They should also be aware of new trends and products, and be in a position to advise you of the best solution to your needs.

And do make sure you know exactly what you're getting, and what you're not, for the quoted price. Will they dig their own trenches for underground cabling? Are the inspection fees included? Also, ask whether an apprentice will be assisting on the job. Apprentices need considerable practical experience to become fully qualified, so it's good for them to be actively involved. Their work is fully supervised, but their time should only be charged if they contribute to the job, and naturally, you shouldn't be paying as much for their work.

Finally, always ask for a COC, unless it's simply been a maintenance job. Electricians fill these out at the end of each fixed wiring project as proof that they have complied with New Zealand's electrical safety standards and codes. The customer should receive a copy of the certificate, as should the Electrical Workers Registration Board. A COC for electrical work will protect you from liability if, after you've sold your house, something goes wrong with the electrical wiring. For people buying property, it is important to ask for a recent COC to ensure the electrical wiring and fittings are in a safe and satisfactory condition. **H**