

PV installers must be electrical contractors

Photovoltaic (PV) installations are electrical installations. Nothing excludes them or makes them specialised. Like any other electrical installation work, PV installations are the domain of the Electrical Contracting Industry.

Any contractor doing PV installation work, from installing solar panels to the actual energising of the building, must be an electrical contractor. An electrical contractor must be registered in terms of the Electrical Installation Regulations (2009) and must either be a licenced electrician or must employ one as a contracting firm in his full-time employ. The Electrical Installation Regulations define 'electrical installation' as "*machinery, in or on any premises, that is used for the transmission of electrical energy from a point of control to a point of consumption anywhere on the premises, including any article that forms part of such an installation, irrespective of whether or not it is part of the electrical circuit.*"

All **new** solar installations require the supervision and general control of an Installation Electrician or Master Installation Electrician. No person other than an Installation Electrician (IE) and a Master Installation Electrician (MIE) can issue a Certificate of Compliance on a solar installation. No other qualification other than an IE or MIE can qualify a person to do so.

No solar installation is allowed to be used by any end-user without it having been inspected and certified as safe by an IE or an MIE. No other qualification is relevant for this purpose. Please note that a licenced Single Phase Tester cannot work with DC and may therefore not sign off on DC installations, which would include PV and any three-phase installations. Therefore, a person with a Single Phase Tester qualification cannot issue a Certificate of Compliance for solar installations.

We recognise that any electrical installation work, including PV installations, requires the installer to be competent and possess the necessary qualifications, experience and knowledge. Competence must be improved continually to stay at the cutting edge of the game. The ECA(SA) undertakes solar PV training and, this year, we will be doing so with much more intensity.

There are other organisations that offer solar PV training, and it must be kept in mind that any 'card' issued by PV training providers is only for supplementary training that expands your knowledge in relation to solar work and is not a qualification to do PV work.

The Electrical Regulations in the OHS Act are clear about who may work in that environment and the only qualifying card is one that proves registration as an electrical contractor with the Department of Employment and Labour.

As Graham Clarke, an ECA(SA) member and owner of an electrical contracting company in Gqeberha, observes, "... the statement that solar installers are suppliers of electricity and that the isolator to the AC connect point is the point of control and therefore does not have to be carried out by an electrical contractor as it is not part of the electrical installation is a myth and, if there was any doubt, this has been removed by the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Electrical Regulations, as well as SANS 10142-1 ED3.01".

All electrical contractors must register with the Bargaining Council for the Electrical Industry (SA) and have their employees governed by the applicable terms of service. The Bargaining Council understands this obligation and will enforce the provisions of the Main Collective Agreement and in particular, registration obligations.

It is illegal to install PV when you are not a registered electrical contractor. You can only qualify to be an Electrical Contractor if you employ an IE or an MIE or you are, yourself, such a person. Registered Electrical Contractors must be registered with the Department of Employment and Labour and the Bargaining Council for the Electrical Industry (SA).

These registrations are not voluntary. There is no choice as to the obligation to be so registered. Failure to do so makes one an illegal operator.

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