

Inadequate testing leads to unlawful killing verdict

The coroner at the inquest into the death of 22-year-old mother Emma Shaw asks whether anything can be done to avoid similar tragedies.

In December 2007, Emma Shaw, a 22-year old mother, was electrocuted in the airing cupboard of her flat in the West Midlands.

At an inquest into Miss Shaw's death, the jury heard how the tragedy resulted from a plasterboard fixing screw being driven into a concealed cable when the flat was being built the previous year, causing the metallic frame of the partition to become 'live' when the electrical installation was energised.

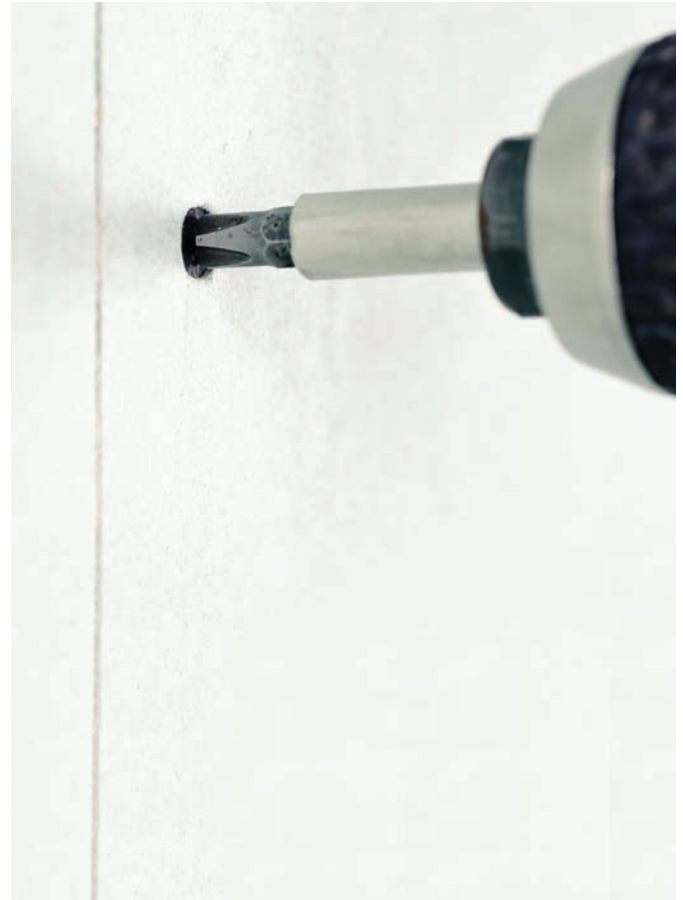
The damage to the cable had not been detected because insulation resistance tests had not been carried out properly on the wiring, the jury was told.

The fault had remained undetected until water from a

leak in a hot water cylinder came into contact with the metal partition. This caused water on the airing cupboard floor also to become 'live', which led to the electrocution when Miss Shaw attempted to turn off the water stop cock when in contact with the water. As the flat was on the first floor, no RCD protection had been provided.

Her son, then aged 23 months, had been shut in the living room while his mother went to tend to the leak.

Last December, after listening to two weeks of evidence, the inquest jury found that the initial testing of the electrical installation in the flat by the installing contractor, Anchor Electrical and Building Services Ltd of Staffordshire,



was "not carried out to a professional standard, if at all".

Evidence at the inquest revealed that when the electricians were installed, a series of errors were made. These included an unqualified electrician's mate testing and approving the wiring in the flat. The inquest heard that four safety documents that the mate had filled out, and which were checked by the company's supervisor, also had a number of errors in them.

The jury said that there had been a "failure by the company to assess the capabilities of their workforce and constantly monitor their development" and a "failure to comply with their health and safety standards". They concluded that Miss Shaw had

been unlawfully killed.

Following the verdict of unlawful killing, the Health and Safety Executive confirmed that new evidence would be passed to the Crown Prosecution Service, which had previously said that there was insufficient evidence to successfully prosecute anyone.

The Coroner told the inquest that he would use coroner's rules to write to the NICEIC and other relevant bodies, asking if anything can be done to curb the practice of electricians signing safety certificates based solely on information reported to them by others.

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