

17th Edition (BS7671: 2008) Frequently Asked Questions

Since its publication in January 2008, different forums and training courses on the 17th Edition of the Wiring Regulations have highlighted some common questions. These are presented below with an explanatory response, to help clarify the requirements of the regulations.

(Note: In all cases the Wiring Regulations should be referred to for the specific requirements for any individual situation.)

Q1 – When do the new regulations come into force and what happens to work that overlaps this date?

From July 1st 2008 all new electrical installations need to be designed to BS7671: 2008 (IEE Wiring Regulations 17th Edition). After this date, only work designed to the 16th Edition before July 1st 2008 can be installed to the 16th Edition.

Q2 – I have heard that only new BS7671: 2008 certificates will be available after January 2009. How will this impact on work designed to the 16th and not completed?

BS7671 does not give any time scale to when installations designed to the 16th have to be completed.

It is important to remember that an electrical installation must be installed, verified and certificated to the version of BS7671 the installation was designed to, for example an electrical installation designed to the BS7671: 2001 (16th) must be verified and certificated to BS7671: 2001 (16th) and an electrical installation designed to the BS7671: 2008 (17th) must be verified and certificated to BS7671: 2008 (17th).

Several organisations offer test certificates that comply with the Wiring Regulations, however the Wiring Regulations do not require certificates to be issued under the brand of any particular organisation.

The ECA offers a full range of BS7671 certificates, and 16th Edition certificates will be available for at least 3 years.

Q3 – Why do the regulations require RCD's to be used more widely in new electrical installations?

RCD's are now required for additional protection against the risk of electric shock for circuits wired with 'non-reinforced' cables (for example PVC/ PVC or similar).

RCD installation is now required on most domestic circuits, particularly for socket outlets; all circuits installed in bathrooms; and where non-reinforced cables are buried less than 50mm deep in walls.

RCD's are not necessarily required in the majority of commercial circuits but the electrical installation still needs to comply with the requirements of the Electricity at Work Regulations.

Q4 – With more RCD's being installed, won't there be an increased amount of nuisance tripping?

To avoid hazards and inconvenience in the event of a fault, the designer has to divide an electrical installation up into sections (a number of circuits) when designing an installation. The design of electrical installations may need to adapt in order to find new ways of complying with the new regulations. Typically, new materials and working practices may need to be adopted to provide practical solutions.

Q5 – There could be major implications if RCD’s are used on circuits supplying some equipment. Are there any allowances made in the 17th?

Socket outlets supplying specific equipment can be installed without RCD protection, if labelled for the specific equipment they supply and if they are also installed to avoid the requirement for an RCD to be installed for impact protection.

There is also an allowance for sockets that are to be used by skilled or instructed persons. For example, in an office where sockets are provided for use on IT equipment, these do not necessarily need to be RCD protected.

It is important to remember that the requirements of the Electricity at Work Regulations must be complied with and an assessment made of the risks associated with the proposed design.

Q6 – What is the design criteria for circuit disconnection times?

The disconnection times have been simplified for circuits. Final circuits in a 230v TN system are all now 0.4 seconds, with distribution circuits allowed to be designed with up to a 5 second disconnection time.

Q7 – After July 1st do all periodic inspections need to comply with the 17th Edition?

No. BS7671 clearly states that electrical installations installed to earlier editions of the Wiring Regulations may not comply fully with the new regulations but this does not mean that they are unsafe or need to be upgraded.

This is particularly important to remember when carrying out periodic inspections, as the criteria requires that the electrical installation is safe; or in the words of BS7671: 2008, “the installation is in a satisfactory condition for continued service”.

When carrying out a periodic inspection, if the installation is in a safe condition but installed to the requirements of a previous version of the Wiring Regulations, the installation should not be failed. Instead, recommendations for improvement may be made, based on the categories stated on the periodic inspection form.

Q8 – What do I need to do to demonstrate I am qualified to the 17th Edition?

Both EAL and City and Guilds offer 17th Edition qualifications that are recognised by the industry. Qualified electricians looking to study the new Wiring Regulations may chose to attend a full training course on the 17th Edition, which provides a full overview of BS7671: 2008.

Alternatively, suitably qualified people may chose to take an update course that covers the changes from the 16th Edition of the Wiring Regulations, but strict pre-qualification criteria applies.

ECS Gold Card holders have the opportunity to take an assessment-only option. Cardholders must hold a full, current and valid ECS Gold Card. This paper-based assessment is only available from the Electrical Contractors’ Association (ECA). Candidates must undertake their own study and preparation prior to sitting the assessment.

Q9 – I am an apprentice, what do I need to do to qualify to the 17th Edition?

Apprentices who have completed their technical certificates in the last 3 years should only need to take the update course and assessment. Any apprentices who are currently studying their technical certificates should automatically be assessed on BS7671: 2008 from September 2008. It is recommended that apprentices discuss the training program that is being studied with their training provider.