

Changing the lighting landscape



The phase out of incandescent lamps and the rollout of MEPS has vastly changed the way in which you buy lamps, writes Megaman managing director Cane Graorosi.

The November 2009 introduction of a sales ban on incandescent lamps has over-shadowed another important change in the supply of lamps to the Australian market - the introduction of the Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) for covered and bare compact fluorescent lamps with integrated ballasts (CFLis), excluding dimmable and reflector CFL lamps.

So, what does this mean for the average household and electrician?

For many years there has been little regulation of CFLis in the Australian market. There has even been reported examples of products being imported and sold in the market that do not have local approvals. These items pose a risk on many fronts.

Currently, the following has to be taken into consideration when consumers purchase a CFLi:

- Are they intrinsically safe to use for the purpose they are designed for? Do they pose a safety risk in terms of fire or electrocution?
- Do they have local approval for sale in the Australian market?
- Does the product meet MEPS Standards?
- Do they conform to electromagnetic compatibility (EMC) compliance (AS/NZCISPR15)? With our ever-increasing array of electrical appliances, electronic

gadgets and digital technology in the home and office, we need to ensure that items are not causing interference to other items. As a result, EMC is an increasingly important issue.

- Lamp performance. MEPS also measures lamps in their lumen maintenance - how much light is coming from the lamp at its end of life? Poor performing lamps generate consumer dissatisfaction with the category and increases reluctance for greater uptake of the product by consumers. Poor lamp life would then mean lamps being replaced more often and leading to more waste products to be dealt with.

Australian MEPS require lamp test procedures to meet a Standard based on one of either the UK Energy Saving Trust (EST) specifications, AS/NZS 4847.1-2008 (part 2) or the Efficient Lighting Initiative (ELI) Standards. These three test criteria cover many attributes of a lamp, including starting and run up time, luminous flux, efficacy and lumen maintenance, power factor and harmonics, premature lamp failure rate, starting in low temperatures, switching withstand, lamp life, colour attributes, mercury content and the actual power used by the lamp.

MEPS requires bare and covered CFLis to meet the essential criteria laid out by the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. It now dictates that products in this market must be registered on the government website www.energyratings.gov.au, which also lists the energy ratings of many other domestic appliances including refrigerators, freezers, air

conditioners and washing machines.

The industry has now had over two years to prepare for the introduction of MEPS since the interim Standards were first published. The MEPS website allows consumers, specifiers and retailers to compare lamp performance in a transparent methodology. The old adage of "comparing apples with apples" applies using this website.

The action of banning incandescent lamps and implementing Standards of compliance for a CFLi is the first in a multi-stage program of raising the efficiency of lighting in Australian households and businesses. With the introduction of progressive price rises on electricity, consumers should not need much incentive to ensure that they are buying the most efficient lighting.

The selection of a MEPS-compliant product at the point of sale is unfortunately not made easy due to lack of action on regulation by government bodies. In Australia, major appliances such as televisions, air conditioners and washing machines are labelled on the product regarding their energy efficiency rating; as yet the same requirements are not carried over to the energy efficient lighting market. In comparison, European markets see a mandatory labelling scheme on energy efficient lighting that assists consumers in their selection and many products available in our local market feature this on their packaging due to supply into the EU market.

As local authorities have yet to legislate any such requirement in Australia, the only reference source for MEPS

compliance is via the Government's website. This is not very useful in retail or wholesale transactions for consumers and contractors as it doesn't provide the information at the time of purchase. This leaves the onus onto the retailer and wholesalers to ensure that they are only stocking compliant product.

Fines for non-compliant sale are an option for the various State government bodies that enforce MEPS regulations. The ruling of fines will vary from State to State – retailers and wholesalers need to check with their local State regulatory authorities. Further, varying 'grandfather' clauses exist in each State to allow for any existing stock. Once these have expired, non-compliant products will be traded at the supplier's own peril.

So, what is the impact on the electrical trade? As clients become more energy and environmental conscious, they

are insisting products supplied are MEPS-approved. Specifications on commercial and domestic projects are quoting requirements equal or exceeding the MEPS target. Installers face rectification charges to correct non-compliant installs.

As the opportunity closes in more regulated markets, such as the European Union, unscrupulous manufacturers and distributors may look to dump these inferior products on the Australian market. Some existing suppliers in the local market admit their products do not comply to AS/NZS 4847.1-2008 and will withdraw products from the market. Some have been caught 'asleep at the wheel' and have only now woken up to the issue of compliance and are required to re-engineer their ranges in the hope of meeting compliance. Many of these non-complying companies outsource production.

The key to success in this transition period to effective and efficient lighting solutions is education through questioning.

Consumers and clients need to question their retailer or the tradesperson regarding the source of supply. They in turn need to question their wholesalers or distributors. The simple question that needs to be asked is: "Are these lamps registered on the www.energyrating.gov.au website?"

Given the long lead time for the introduction of MEPS and the fact it became a requirement from 1 November 2009, then you really do have to question why products are not registered. ■

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