

# MEDIA STATEMENT



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## **AUDITOR GENERAL CRITICAL OF SAFETY DEVICE PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC HOUSING**

In his latest report delivered to Parliament today, Auditor General Colin Murphy found the installation and maintenance of Residual Current Devices (RCDs) and smoke alarms in public housing was poorly managed and did not minimise the risk to tenants and properties from electrocution and fire.

Mr Murphy found that the Housing Authority (Housing) set out to fit all its properties with RCDs and hard wired smoke alarms well ahead of the deadline set by State legislation, but it had not been successful in meeting these good intentions.

"Housing underestimated the difficulty of making sure over 35,000 properties spread across the State all had required safety devices and did not assess the risk if this was not achieved," Mr Murphy said.

"This is an important public safety issue and yet Housing treated the installation of these devices as a routine maintenance issue.

"The appropriate levels of monitoring and oversight that the RCD and smoke alarm programs needed was not established and as a result some homes were left without the required safety devices, and the status of other homes is not clear.

"Housing was slow to recognise that its RCD retrofit program had not achieved its objectives and it did not take the appropriate action to identify and address the reasons why.

"Housing could and should have done more to improve this program earlier."

State legislation requires all rental properties to be fitted with RCDs by no later than August 2011 and hard wired smoke alarms by no later than October 2011, or at a change of tenant from August 2009 and from October 2009 respectively. The *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* and associated government policies require Housing to make its properties safe.

In 2005 Housing started retrofitting RCDs to all its properties after it received funding of \$7.6 million for the program. In 1997 Housing started a five year program to retrofit smoke alarms to all existing properties and in 2007 and 2008 Housing commenced three programs to upgrade smoke alarms.

Mr Murphy said his report found deeper systemic problems that resulted in Housing being unable to provide assurance that all its properties have the required safety devices.

"Housing's property information is often unreliable, property inspections are not consistently conducted, and Housing's practices for timely repair or replacement of faulty safety devices are inadequate," he said.

"These issues mean that Housing is not minimising the risks to its tenants and properties.

"Importantly, Housing has taken recent action to address gaps in its RCD retrofit program, which should provide some reassurance to its tenants.

"Addressing the underlying issues highlighted in this report will require longer term changes to Housing's organisation, systems and processes."

The Auditor General's report, *Fitting and Maintaining Safety Devices in Public Housing*, can be viewed at [www.audit.wa.gov.au](http://www.audit.wa.gov.au). Information on smoke alarms can be found at [www.fesa.wa.gov.au](http://www.fesa.wa.gov.au) and on RCDs at [www.energysafety.wa.gov.au/RCD](http://www.energysafety.wa.gov.au/RCD).

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