Senate Budget Proposes to Sweep Electrical Fund

A dedicated account known as the Electrical License Fund is where the law requires your electrical permit and licensing fees to be deposited. This account is the sole funding source for the L&I electrical program. As of this writing, the fund has enough - about 8 million dollars - to support the L&I electrical program operations for about 4 months. Like any business, the electrical program cannot spend money if none is there to spend. A harsh example of a spending adjustment happened during the recession when L&I had to lay off about 50 electrical inspectors in 2009 and 2010 because there was not going to be enough in the fund to pay them. I know we were not alone in such actions. Many of you faced similar challenges. Recovery is proving to be a long process.

Every two years, the legislature sets a limit on the amount L&I can spend to operate the electrical program. Faced with an increasing workload brought on by our recovering economy, we requested additional spending authority for 18 positions needed to support the increased workload. The good news is that every budget proposal put forth this legislative session provides spending authority as requested. But there are big differences in the budget proposals now being considered by the legislature. The biggest differences are found in the Senate budget - ESSB 5048, which proposes to provide 9 inspector positions to L&I and earmark $2,117,000 to be used for grants to local governments to help them start their own electrical inspection programs. In addition, the Senate budget proposal would sweep another $2,000,000 from the electrical fund and deposit it into the general fund. When your contributions are swept away from a fund dedicated to support services you paid for, things like better inspection response times and more enforcement of licensing laws that support recovery will be hard to accomplish. The House proposal - HB 1067, and Governor’s budget proposals do not contain provisions to sweep the electrical fund.

In other legislative news, bills affecting the electrical industry discussed in the March 2017 newsletter have stalled and will not be moving forward this session. You can find more information about any legislation by visiting the legislative website at: http://leg.wa.gov/Pages/default.aspx.

WAC 296-46B Electrical Rule Revisions – Public Hearing

The proposed rule revision to WAC 296-46B regarding adoption of the 2017 National Electrical Code was filed on February 28, 2017, and is posted on the Rule Development page of our website. If you would like to comment on the proposed rule you may submit written comment or attend and comment at the public hearing. Written comments may be sent to Alicia Curry: PO Box 44400, Olympia, WA 98504-4400; Alicia.Curry@Lni.wa.gov; or by fax to 360-902-5292, by 5 p.m. on April 6, 2017. A public hearing will be held on April 6, 2017 at 9 a.m. at the Tumwater L&I building, 7273 Linderson Way SW, Tumwater, WA 98501.

Another rulemaking activity involves rules regarding provisions for temporary electricians and allowing a path for Canadian Red Seal Endorsed electricians to qualify for the 01 general certificate of competency exam. This was the subject of emergency rulemaking which became effective November 21, 2016. An extension was filed on March 21, 2017 extending the emergency rules for another 120 days. More information about this rulemaking can be found on the Rule Development page.
Working on Energized Service Drops

Question: Is an electrician permitted to disconnect and/or reconnect a secondary service drop on the utility’s side of the meter?

The short answer is no - only individuals who meet the training and experience requirements in WAC 296-45, Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution, are considered to be “qualified electrical employees” and able to work on or with exposed energized lines or parts of equipment operating at 50 volts or more.

The training that qualified electrical employees must have according to WAC 296-45 will include training necessary to work on energized primary and secondary conductors that are not typically protected by overcurrent devices. This qualifies the employee to take a clearance (i.e., receive authorization to work) on the lines or equipment to control the energy source when necessary. The training that Washington certified electricians receive may not be focused towards working on energized lines and equipment, except for testing and certain conditions where it is infeasible to de-energize.

Information on electrical safety-related work practices can be found in the General Safety and Health Standards, WAC 296-24-965 and NFPA 70E. These practices will give guidance to employers on allowing qualified electricians to work on energized utilization systems under limited circumstances. Work practices found in WAC 296-45-065 are applicable to work performed on the utility side of the metered demarcation line. If you would like more information, please contact Jeff Krausse, the DOSH Telecommunications and High Voltage Supervisor at 509-764-6908 or krau235@lni.wa.gov.

Electrical Board Openings

In July, there will be five seats on the Electrical Board that will be up for appointment by the Governor. Some of the seats are held by incumbents who are eligible for reappointment. The Board meets four times per year and serves a vital role in advising L&I on all matters pertaining to Washington’s electrical laws, rules, and policies. The role and membership of the Board is described in RCW 19.28.311. Seats that will be open for appointment or reappointment in July are: one representative of an electrical contractor association, one licensed professional electrical engineer who is also a registered communications distribution designer, one telecommunications worker, one outside line worker, and one certified electrician. You can submit an application or recommend an applicant using the forms on the Governor’s Boards & Commissions website. Application must be made using the Governor’s form. You may attach your resume and any additional information you would like considered at the bottom of the application before submitting. If you have any questions about completing the application, please contact Gov. Inslee’s Office by email or call 360-902-4111.

Temporary Plug and Cord Wiring – Carnivals, Fairs, Concerts, Trade Shows and Similar Events

Due to recent questions, we are revisiting and clarifying department policy regarding temporary plug and cord wiring for carnivals, fairs, concerts, trade shows and similar events. This article supersedes a previous newsletter article printed in February 2012. A permit and inspection is required for any type of temporary power distribution system that uses generators, dimmers, transformers, feeders, branch circuits, or other means that distribute power to electrical equipment (e.g. amplifiers, lights, etc.). A distribution system means the interconnecting wiring, spider boxes, or other equipment that is installed to distribute power to the end user (e.g. booth operator, vendor, etc.) for plugging in their equipment. Wiring a temporary power distribution system, using plug and cord wiring methods, is not exempt from permit and inspection requirements even if the power source is from a permanently installed electrical receptacle.

If the plug and cord system are owned by the installer (e.g. show operator, road crew, etc.), the installer is considered to be an owner and is exempted from the requirements for electrical contractor licensing and certification by RCW 19.28.261(1) so long as the installer has approval from the property owner to make the electrical installation and there is no hard wiring involved in the system. When these conditions are met, the plug and cord electrical distribution system is the “place of business” for the system/equipment owner or firm.

Ugly Picture: If viewing this document online, click on the picture to open a larger image.

This was a service panel that caught fire after water damage due to a poorly sealed flashing on the service mast penetration. The contractor told the inspector water was traveling under the flashing through the roof penetration, down the outside of the conduit into the panel.

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