

ROEBOURNE FATALITY — HOMESWEST HOUSING — RESIDUAL CURRENT DEVICE

660. Mrs L.M. HARVEY to the Minister for Housing and Works:

Mr Speaker —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You don't know what's happening or what's doing. You can't answer anything.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: When you are done!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, there is somewhat of a tradition in this place that once a previous question has been answered—whether members are happy or not happy with that answer is not the question—respect is given to the next member on his or her feet asking the question. I hope that respect will continue. I give the call to the member for Scarborough.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

On a more serious note, my question is for the Minister for Housing and Works. In light of the tragic circumstances around the death of a little boy in Roebourne on Saturday evening, will the minister please advise the house what the government will do to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

Firstly, I thank the member for some notice of this question. It would be only fair and appropriate on behalf of every member of the house to extend to the family of that young boy our most sincere condolences. Most of us are parents and most of us would be uncles of young kids. I cannot imagine—I am sure no member of this place can—what the family is going through.

I can also assure the house that the government, through the Department of Housing and other agencies, will be offering every assistance possible to the family in question. They have been offered alternative accommodation, and other government agencies will be providing care and support as required.

I should also inform the house that on Sunday an officer from the office of EnergySafety attended the scene and has begun an investigation to confirm the cause of death. That investigation will dovetail in with the State Coroner's efforts in relation to that matter, and that matter will be concluded in due course.

Members may be interested to know that the house was one of a duplex. It was not fitted with a residual current device. The house next door, the other half of the duplex, was fitted with a residual current device. I am not saying that the presence of a residual current device would have prevented this unfortunate event from occurring, but a decision was taken, rightly so, by the former government in 2005 to install residual current devices in all Homeswest properties, because they save lives and prevent in-house electrocutions. The fact that this property did not have an RCD whilst the property next door did is in my view a very serious issue and raises a large number of unanswered questions.

By way of background to the member, in 2005, as I pointed out, the former government initiated and funded a program to install residual current devices into all Homeswest properties either built or acquired prior to and including 1991. From 1992 onwards, as I understand it, all properties acquired or built had residual current devices installed. That program was to be completed by 30 June 2007. It would be fair to say that the former housing ministers had, as I had, a reasonable expectation that that program had been completed. Interestingly and of concern to me, we are looking at about 22 000 properties in the metropolitan and country areas. The first area of concern to me is the fact that Homeswest then began a process of reviewing those 22 000 properties. So far Homeswest has inspected 19 354 properties; and of those, 211 were found to not have RCDs installed. The balance of about 2 650 properties are yet to be inspected. Unfortunately the property in Roebourne had not been inspected. That in and of itself is a serious concern and something on which I am seeking further information.

I will draw to the house's attention a couple of other quick points. Firstly, in August 2006, an electrical contractor signed a form, a notice of completion form issued by and then sent back to the office of EnergySafety. On that form the contractor indicated that an upgraded switchboard and an RCD had been installed in this particular property; there is no RCD currently at that particular property. In November last year a Department of Housing person entered into the Department of Housing database information that said, "We've conducted our annual inspection of the property and there is an RCD at that property." There was no residual current device at that property. On 20 January this year an electrician was called to that particular property to fix what turned out

to be an electrical fault because the tenant had reported seeing sparks. A double power plug was fixed to the side of the wall. Again, nobody noticed there was no RCD there. Over and above the causes of death and the situation surrounding the tragic loss of this little boy there are serious questions that I am asking of the Department of Housing.

I can inform the house that following phone calls from my office, we have written today to the Auditor General and asked the Auditor General to commence a compliance review of the RCD program from within the Department of Housing and to review some other aspects of the operation of the Department of Housing, because I have serious concerns about the department's performance in relation to this. I have also asked the department to provide me with time lines around which it will install the 211 outstanding RCDs in both metropolitan and country areas, and around which it will have the outstanding 2 650 homes inspected.

Again, this is a tragic circumstance. I think there are serious questions the Department of Housing will need to answer over and above the outcome of investigations surrounding the tragic death of the young boy. I heard the shadow Minister for Housing on the radio this morning. This is not a political issue; this is an issue about doing the right thing. My commitment to the house is that I am very happy to provide the opposition, including the shadow minister and the local member, with whatever briefings they require on this matter. I have spoken to the local member. At a time he deems to be appropriate and if he thinks it will help with the situation, I am happy to go with him to Roebourne to understand more what we can do to assist in this circumstance.