

# Buying electrical equipment online

What you need to know

A close-up photograph of a person's hands using a laptop and a credit card. The person is wearing a grey sweater. The image is partially obscured by large, overlapping geometric shapes in shades of orange, blue, and teal.

Creating a safer state  
with electricity and gas

# Beware of dodgy electrical equipment sold **online.**

Be careful when buying electrical equipment online—some of the items for sale on the internet do not meet Australian safety requirements.

In 2014 a woman was killed after using a cheap USB charger that did not meet Australian electrical safety standards.

Unsafe electrical appliances and equipment are a danger to yourself and others. Be especially careful when buying from overseas suppliers because you may have limited recourse if your product turns out to be non-compliant.

This brochure provides information for consumers and Australian and New Zealand-based suppliers. It also contains contact details for ESV and other agencies that can provide you with more detailed information.

## **What is electrical equipment?**

Electrical equipment means any appliance, wire, fitting, cable, conduit or apparatus that is designed to generate, use, convey or control electricity.

This includes appliances, socket outlets, powerboards, travel adaptors, lamps, apparatus and machines whether portable, hand held, stationary or fixed.

## **What should I look for when buying electrical equipment?**

There are two categories of electrical equipment in Australia: prescribed and non-prescribed. It is important to understand the difference so that you know what to look for when buying online.

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Non-compliant equipment can cause electrical shock, fire, injury or **death.**

## Prescribed Electrical Equipment

Generally speaking, prescribed electrical equipment means household appliances such as toasters, vacuum cleaners, power supplies/chargers, coffee machines, soldering irons and portable tools.

### Further reading

An up-to-date list of prescribed electrical equipment can be found at:  
**[www.esv.vic.gov.au/  
Electricity-Professionals/  
Electrical-equipment-and-  
appliances/Definitions-of-  
equipment-classes](http://www.esv.vic.gov.au/Electricity-Professionals/Electrical-equipment-and-appliances/Definitions-of-equipment-classes)**

## Non-Prescribed Electrical Equipment

Electrical equipment that is not classified as prescribed may be supplied to the public without first being approved. However, it is the responsibility of the supplier to ensure that non-prescribed electrical equipment offered for supply meets relevant minimum safety standards.

Some examples of non-prescribed equipment are portable air conditioners, pumps, fixed luminaires and LED lamps. Non-prescribed equipment may incorporate prescribed articles such as the supply flexible cord and plug.

# Take precautions to stay safe.

First, establish that the seller you are dealing with is contactable. Be wary if you cannot verify their business details or the seller is not willing to give their contact details. If they are based overseas, ask if they have a responsible entity in Australia or New Zealand that deals with all aspects of the purchase and after-sales.

Here are some common questions answered.

## What should I ask the supplier before I buy?

### Prescribed equipment

If the equipment you intend to buy is in the prescribed equipment category, ask for a valid copy of the certificate of approval or approval number for the product. Approved products are required to be marked with the approval number or the RCM symbol as shown below. Match the information such as the model name, trade name, power rating and description of the product to the information stated on the certificate. If the certificate is valid and details match, it is likely that the equipment is approved. You can also use the public search function at [www.erac.gov.au](http://www.erac.gov.au) to check that your equipment is approved.

Also, you may request a photo of the rating label to see if the product is actually marked with this information and supplied with the Australian plug.

If the supplier cannot supply the compliance documents, **buy at your own risk.** The equipment may not be compliant with Australian safety requirements.

If the equipment is being offered with a non-compliant plug or is an overseas model with or without an adaptor, be concerned and avoid the purchase. This indicates that the product may not be approved and may not be suitable for use in Australia.

### Non-Prescribed

When the equipment is outside the scope of the prescribed equipment category, the approval is voluntary only. However, we recommend that you request compliance documents for the product and only purchase once you are satisfied with the information provided.



Visit [www.erac.gov.au](http://www.erac.gov.au) and use the public search function to check if your equipment is approved.

Equipment may not be suitable for **240V** and may fail unsafely.

## **Who do I contact if I have a concern?**

Contact your local electrical safety regulator to report a website or a seller offering electrical equipment that is possibly not compliant or unapproved. If your concern is not related to electrical safety, please contact department of consumer affairs in your home state or Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

## **What are the common risks associated with electrical equipment?**

Depending upon the design and construction of the electrical equipment along with its intended application, non-compliant equipment may cause electrical shock, fire, injury or death.

  
If you cannot obtain and verify the approval details, do not buy the electrical equipment.

## **Overseas suppliers offer branded appliances at competitive prices— why should I refrain from buying an overseas model?**

Australian electrical safety standards are derived from international electrical safety standards, but there are several variations between the two, for example testing to a voltage for Australian conditions and flammability requirements.

An overseas model may not meet local safety requirements and most likely will not be approved. Additionally, when supplied with a non-compliant plug with or without a travel adaptor, these products pose further risk of injury or death of the user.

It has been observed that most of the suppliers offering electrical equipment online have limited control of the product construction and usually work as an agent. Most agents are unlikely to know if the product has been changed by the wholesaler or manufacturer. They normally do not have provisions to inspect the equipment for quality and compliance with electrical safety requirements.

## Examples of non-compliant and unapproved electrical equipment purchased online



### Tip

Visit [www.erac.gov.au](http://www.erac.gov.au) and use the public search function to check that your equipment is approved

Compliance	Description	Image
✘	Unapproved Edison screw lamp holder	
✘	Unapproved compact fluorescent lamp	
✘	Non-compliant and unapproved travel adaptors	

## National body and local electrical safety regulators

State	Organisation	Website	Phone number
National	ERAC	<a href="http://www.erac.gov.au">www.erac.gov.au</a>	07 3405 6463
QLD	Electrical Safety Office Department of Justice and Attorney-general	<a href="http://www.eso.qld.gov.au">www.eso.qld.gov.au</a>	07 3225 2000
NSW	NSW Fair Trading	<a href="http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au">www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au</a>	13 32 20
VIC	Energy Safe Victoria	<a href="http://www.esv.vic.gov.au">www.esv.vic.gov.au</a>	03 9203 9700
ACT	Environment and Sustainable Development	<a href="http://www.actpla.act.gov.au">www.actpla.act.gov.au</a>	03 6207 1923
TAS	Electricity Standards and Safety Department of Justice	<a href="http://www.justice.tas.gov.au">www.justice.tas.gov.au</a>	03 6233 8338
SA	Office of Consumer and Business Affairs	<a href="http://www.ocba.sa.gov.au">www.ocba.sa.gov.au</a>	08 8204 9696
WA	Energy Safety WA	<a href="http://www.energysafety.wa.gov.au">www.energysafety.wa.gov.au</a>	08 9422 5200
New Zealand	Energy Safety Service Ministry of Consumer Affairs	<a href="http://www.ess.govt.nz">www.ess.govt.nz</a>	+64 3962 6248

For further information go to  
**[www.esv.vic.gov.au](http://www.esv.vic.gov.au)** or phone  
ESV on **1800 652 563**.

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