

Electricians to be referred to police for alleged attempt to defraud energy efficiency scheme

A case involving an alleged attempt to defraud Australia's biggest energy efficiency certificate scheme will be referred to police by Victoria's Essential Services Commission.

The attempted fraud came to light when an eagle-eyed member of the public tipped us off that some electricians were faking the before-photographs to inflate the benefits of lighting upgrades in farm sheds in regional Victoria.

Commission chair Kate Symons says a seven-month investigation uncovered a significant attempt to defraud the scheme.

"In addition to the site inspections at some of these sites, our staff uncovered the scale of the attempted fraud when they noticed the same light ballasts were being used for the 'before' photos in a number of locations.

"They found the electricians reused the same ballasts across multiple sites over almost two years (January 2019 to August 2020) and failed to provide supporting documents to prove the 'removed' light ballasts had been destroyed as required under the scheme," she said.

The commission found two of the scheme's accredited providers were unwitting parties to the attempted fraud, repeatedly but unintentionally creating certificates that did not meet the requirements of the scheme.

The two companies – Ecocare Carbon Solutions Pty Ltd and National Carbon Bank of Australia Pty Ltd – must surrender more than 28,000 certificates between them with a combined value of more than \$1.6 million*.

The investigation found the companies had poor procedures for monitoring sub-contractors and have been ordered to conduct an independent audit to improve their systems.

The commission will refer the case to Victoria Police and Energy Safe Victoria.

Under the Victorian Energy Upgrades scheme, large energy retailers offset greenhouse gas emissions by acquiring energy efficient certificates from hundreds of accredited persons who install energy-efficient products in homes and businesses across Victoria.

* value of Victorian energy efficient certificates = \$60 at 21 May 2021

For further information call: David Jarwood, Senior Media Adviser, 0492 805 003

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