

## Mandatory safety switch to save lives

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**Anthony Deceglie**

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### **NEW rules to make homes safer are due this year, but will come too late for 12-year-old Jay Jammal who was killed by an electric shock.**

His mother, Denise, had just taken him shopping for textbooks and a new school uniform when he was electrocuted in his South Lake home on January 23.

Due to have started high school this year, Jay had told family members how much he had been looking forward to celebrating Australia Day.

“He loved to tinker with things,” Mrs Jammal told The Sunday Times.

“If something broke in the house, he would take great delight in grabbing the screwdriver and pulling it apart so he could fix it.”

On the day he died, Mrs Jammal left Jay in the family's living room while she showered. Without her knowing, he grabbed an old juicer machine destined for the tip and took it apart.

He removed the motor from the juicer and plugged it into the wall.

“I jumped in the shower at 5.15pm and went into the room and found Jay at 5.45pm,” she said.

“He was collapsed on the floor. At first I thought he was playing around because he was slumped over, but he wouldn't respond.

“I dragged him from the back room into the kitchen and rang 000.”

Mrs Jammal performed CPR on Jay for 20 minutes while awaiting ambulances.

Jay's father, Lee, was driving home from work as paramedics were trying to save his son.

“I followed an ambulance into our street wondering whose home it was heading towards,” he said.

“It pulled into our driveway and I jumped out of the car.

“I ran in and there were four paramedics working on Jay, who was lying on the kitchen floor.”

The electric current that killed Jay was so strong that the wires he was holding melted into his hand.

“The coroner told us it was quick,” Mrs Jammal said.

“From his hand to his heart, it took just a few seconds.”

Jay's parents had no idea their home was not properly equipped with a safety switch to monitor their electricity.

The devices became mandatory in new houses after 1990.

Since 2000 this was expanded in WA to require at least two for each new house.

But older housing has no protection, even though it would be of greatest benefit for houses with ageing wiring.

Four out of five houses built before 1990 do not have a safety switch. Many families similar to Jay's are living in these houses unaware they are not protected.

Thirty-three out of the 38 electrocutions in WA homes in the past 16 years could have been prevented if a safety switch had been installed.

In the past 12 months, a safety switch could have saved five lives -- including Jay's.

Safety switches detect minute changes in the electrical current balance of a circuit, so that if a person touches a live part of an appliance or cable accidentally, the safety switch trips the circuit rapidly.

The Jammals want the Government to introduce legislation for the mandatory retrofitting of safety switches in houses.

“They need to do it before somebody else dies,” Mrs Jammal said.

“People look at houses and they check the reticulation, the airconditioning and the dishwasher, but none of it means anything if you're going to lose your child.”

“Nobody thinks to check if there is a safety switch.”

Government department EnergySafety realised two years ago that an advertising campaign encouraging people to voluntarily install safety switches in old houses wasn't working.

For the past two years it has been working on an amendment to the 1945 Electricity Act that would require installation of at least two safety switches \_ where they are not already fitted \_ before houses are sold or leased.

Through this program it is expected that more than 90 per cent of the housing stock in WA would be equipped with safety switches within 15 years.

Commerce Minister Troy Buswell wants the new rules in place before the end of the year.

“I fully support the amendment to the Electricity Act to help prevent such tragedies,” Mr Buswell said.

“I have already approved the drafting of new regulations, which is in progress, and expect to see

the implementation of this important regulation before the end of 2009."

Some other states and territories have adopted a similar program or are proposing to do so.

But there is concern that the cost of the safety switches in low socio-economic areas around WA will be a problem.

The cost of two single-phase safety switches is about \$200.

The total cost of installing the units is about \$600.

Mrs Jammal said she hoped Jay's tragedy would make people check their homes.

Jay was an organ donor. His corneas and heart valves will be used to help sick children.

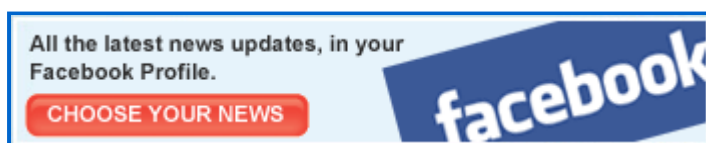
"He was a fantastic kid," Mrs Jammal said. "He was happy. He was well-mannered. He was adventurous and full of life."

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