

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 3003

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to exempting computer wires and fiber optic cables from electrical wiring requirements.

Brief Description: Exempting computer wires and fiber optic cables from electrical wiring requirements.

Sponsors: Representatives Honeyford, Crouse, Mielke, Wensman, Benson, Clements, Schoesler and Bush.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Commerce & Labor: 2/4/98, 2/5/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/12/98, 60-36.

Senate Amended.

House Concurred.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE & LABOR

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives McMorris, Chairman; Honeyford, Vice Chairman; Wood, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt; Clements; Hatfield and Lisk.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Conway, Ranking Minority Member; and Cole.

Staff: Selwyn Walters (786-7117).

Background: The Department of Labor and Industries regulates the installation, repair and maintenance of electrical wires, equipment, and services. This regulatory process involves the permitting and inspection of electrical work. The department inspects all electrical wiring, appliances, devices and equipment regulated by the electricians and electrical installations statute. The statute exempts from inspection telephone, telegraph, radio, television wires and equipment, television antenna installations, signal strength amplifiers, and coaxial installations.

Summary of Bill: Fiber optic cables are exempted from the electricians and electrical installations statute. Persons or business entities that repair, install, or maintain structured communication cabling are exempted from electrical contractor licensing, and electricians' certification requirements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Fiber optic cables and computer wires are not different from telephone and telegraph wires, both of which are exempted from inspection under current law. Fiber optic cables conduct no electricity and computer cables conduct less voltages than telephone wires. A proposal by the Department of Labor and Industries to require the installation of fiber optic cables and computer wires by certified journeyman electricians is unfair to many workers who have been installing computer wires and fiber optic cable for many years. The proposal would also cause many workers to lose their jobs because they are not certified journeyman electricians. There would be additional infrastructure costs for the installation of fiber optic cables and computer cables, particularly in schools and large buildings. The Department of Labor and Industries' proposed rule is not justified because there is no evidence of work injuries or safety violations related to the installation of computer wires and fiber optic cables.

Testimony Against: The deregulation of the installation of computer wires and fiber optic wires would create a safety hazard and compromise the integrity of systems, and would ultimately cause liability issues. The term "computer wire" is worded too broadly and will create confusion and challenges as to the type of electrical work to be excluded from the installation standards of state law and the National Electrical Code. Possibly excluded from inspections are cables used in fire alarm systems in schools and hospitals, security systems in prisons, and patient care monitoring systems. Also, possibly excluded from inspections are paging, energy management and other control systems which, if not properly installed by a well trained and certified electrician may result in injury to the installer and the public, and damage to property.

Testified: (Pro) Rosemary Williamson, Mike Williams & Craig Paterson, GTE; Chris Cook & Robert Olson, WA Communication & Cabling Contractors Assoc.; Larry Gow, Tacoma School District; and Terry Vann, WA Independent Telephone Association. (Con) Richard King & David Johnson, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; Bill Bowser, Puget Sound Electrical JATC; and Larry Stevens, National Electrical Contractors Association. (For information) Janet Lewis, Department of Labor and Industries.