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SA gets new preferred standard for socket outlet systems



The SANS 164-2 plug and socket outlet system.



Gianfranco Campetti, chairman of the SABS SC23B mirror committee.

A STANDARD that is said to be the "safest in the world – SANS 164-2 – has been adopted as the preferred standard for electrical plugs and socket outlets in South Africa. Small and hexagonal with three pins, the new plug and socket configuration is set to replace the old SANS 164-1 socket outlets.

Gianfranco Campetti, chairman of the SABS SC23B mirror committee says the SANS 164-2 three-pin socket outlet is safer because it has a 'skirt' that prevents the exposure of live plug pins. With its three levels of safety, the new SANS 164-2 plug and socket outlet system will be the safest in the world, with only Switzerland's plug and socket outlet system being close to that level of safety. The new socket outlets have smaller holes and it is now impossible for a child to insert its fingers into the socket.

Campetti says that during the 1990s the SABS adopted the IEC socket outlet system for use in South Africa. "At the time, it was seen as a fantastic opportunity for South Africa to be at the forefront of this new 'international' plug and socket configuration and be the first country to adopt it." But there was little interest from manufacturers to implement it because of the huge expenses attached to the tooling required to make new manufacturing moulds.

However, in 2012, a decade or so later, SANS 164-2 was referred to by SANS 10142-1 – South African National Standard for the Wiring of Premises (known to electricians as the Wiring Code) – as the preferred standard for electrical socket outlets.

He says it is envisaged that SANS 164-2 plugs and socket outlets would be utilised in all new installations from 2015, possibly longer – for the old SANS 164-1 standard plugs and sockets to be phased out.

The new plugs and socket outlets are already available from leading suppliers, however, at this stage it is believed that it will be a "few years" before household products fitted with the new plugs – kettles, irons, fridges and other appliances – will be readily available from retail outlets.

The phasing in of the SANS 164-2 plugs and socket outlets means that they would only be required in new installations and it would not be illegal to have the old standard SANS 164-1 plugs and sockets.

Campetti explains that South Africa adopted the UK standard of three large round pins in the 1930s but elected not follow the UK when flat pins were brought out there in the 1970s. "At the end of the 1990s, South Africa was introduced to two new plugs: the Europlug – a double insulated two-pin cell phone charger plug – and the unearthed Schuko plug used on power tools. As the various manufacturers were not prepared to make specific versions for the relatively small South African market, two new standards were adopted.

These are SANS 164-5 two-pin, non-rewireable system (2,5A; 250V) for equipment such as cell phone chargers; and SANS 164-6 two-pin system (16A; 250V) for power tools and electrical equipment such as lawnmowers and edge-trimmers," says Campetti.

"Unfortunately, SANS 164-2 will be another unique South African plug and socket configuration, with the exception of Brazil where it is used alongside an additional variation with thicker pins," says Campetti.

"So, it will not be possible to use the new SANS 164-2 plugs elsewhere in the world – unless other countries adopt the standard, too."

For more information, go to www.crown.co.za and read Mark Palmer's column, 'SANS 1014201 and socket outlets' (October, 2012) on the Sparks web page.

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