

Illegal wiring fines hiked

First offense is \$1,000 bite

By Dan Klepal

dklepal@courier-journal.com

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Electricity still was pulsating through 5-year-old Isaac Lawrence's body minutes after he touched his baby sitters' garage door and fell to the ground.

The boy was killed in 2002 when he touched metal on the door after playing in water. An investigation found that the recently added garage had been improperly wired, without a permit. That meant the wiring was never inspected.

Isaac's death was the start of a long campaign for Bonnie Lawrence, her husband Russell and Isaac's grandfather Charlie Hunton — that culminated yesterday with the Louisville Metro Council unanimously voting to raise the fines for people who do electrical wiring without a permit.

The previous fine of \$100 has been raised to \$1,000 for a first offense; \$2,000 for any subsequent offense. Each day a violation continues constitutes a separate offense.

The Lawrence family had to get a state law changed before the council could act. The revised state statute, which allows cities and counties to increase the fines, was signed last year by Gov. Ernie Fletcher.

"This has been a nightmare," Bonnie Lawrence said. "You need a permit to get an inspection. An inspection would have saved my son's life."

Bonnie Lawrence told the council that her family's investigation revealed that Jefferson County contractors and residents widely ignored the existing ordinance because the fine was so low.

"The fine for a dog defecating in someone's yard was more," Hunton told the council. "This could happen anywhere. It could have been anyone's child."

The revised law gives inspectors the right to cite anyone who has performed electrical work without a permit. Council member Ellen Call, R-26th District, has worked closely with the family to get the laws revised.

"Years of work have gone into this," Call said. "I believe the penalties now are large enough to serve as a deterrent to renegade contractors."

Hunton said after the vote that his family isn't done. He believes many homeowners don't realize the danger they could be placing their families in by doing their own, un-permitted wiring jobs.

The Lawrence family plans to continue a state-wide educational campaign, using their story to warn others of the dangers and of the increased fines for not obtaining a permit.

"We'll be at the state fair," Hunton said. There are still 80 counties in Kentucky with no permitting process at all."

Also yesterday, the council voted 24-1 in favor of increasing sewer rates throughout Jefferson County.

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