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1 in 5 home solar panel systems 'substandard'

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Nearly 200,000 solar panel systems on Australian homes may not have been installed properly, a parliamentary committee has heard.

Random checks of 7000 solar units found 19 per cent were "substandard" and would need retrospective work, according to the federal Clean Energy Regulator.

There are now more than a million solar photovoltaic - known as solar PV - units on roofs around the country.

Based on the random audit, 190,000 could be substandard.

The budget estimates hearing in Canberra on Monday heard four per cent were found to be "unsafe" and shut down on the spot. That equates to 40,000 units across the country that could pose a danger.

Andrew Livingston, executive general manager – renewables and carbon farming - at the Clean Energy Regulator said that in general installers had reacted "promptly" to requests to fix substandard and unsafe solar units.

But he also conceded that homeowners can be left with substandard work because there is no way for the regulator to compel installers to fix up dodgy work.

Rather, the regulator can fine the 1000-or so licensed agents that contract installers to do work. Agents can be fined \$3500 or face losing their certificate, Mr Livingston said.

Liberal senator Simon Birmingham questioned the system. "You tell them it's substandard and they either do something about it or they don't?"

But Mr Livingston said the system was working well in general.

"On the whole, the quality of installers and come back of installers is very good," he said.

In terms of "serious malpractice", he told the committee that the regulator currently has five cases that may or may not progress to court action against the installer.

In February, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission announced it had received 1613 complaints about solar systems in 2012, up from 1229 the year before. These are in addition to complaints made to state-based fair trading authorities.

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