

12th September 2011

ARMA urges residents to take action on concealed flues during Gas Safety Week

As the very first Gas Safety Week gets under way, the Association of Residential Managing Agents (ARMA) is urging people living in blocks of flats to act now to ensure concealed gas flues are safe.

Some properties, particularly flats and apartments, have been built with gas flues behind walls or within ceilings. "Concealed flues can be dangerous as it makes them difficult to inspect and to detect any safety concerns" comments Peter Denning, chairman of ARMA. "A flue system in poor condition connected to an appliance that is not working correctly could put residents at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning which can be swift, silent and deadly".

In response to concerns raised by several of its members over this issue, ARMA has produced an advisory note (Lessee Advisory Note 18: Flues in Voids) to help residents understand the potential dangers of concealed gas flues and why they need to take action. The guidance was also produced in reaction to a recent Safety Notice issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) which requires inspection hatches to be fitted to concealed flues. The document summarises what action needs to be taken in properties where flues are concealed, what to do if residents are unsure whether they have them and what to do if flue systems pass through other flats within the same block.

When ARMA contacted its members for feedback on the issue, one member got in touch to say "I, like many, thought that carbon monoxide leaks really only happened in poorly maintained accommodation. In reality this is not the case. We were involved in a leak at a high-end block where all the flats had new, state of the art boilers and heating systems. A couple were very lucky to survive, having been found unconscious by their daughter as they hadn't turned up for a lunch appointment. The whole building had to be evacuated and remained empty for a period of time whilst tests were carried out. The carbon monoxide had spread throughout the whole block, residents had to stay in hotels and all apartments had to have new front doors as the fire brigade had to force entry into each one. The total insurance claim was in excess of £20,000. Some sold their apartments as they couldn't face living there again".

The member concluded by saying "I still worry about owners not having Carbon Monoxide alarms. Most are happy to have smoke alarms. You can at least see the smoke - you can't see carbon monoxide!"

Under the new HSE requirements, residents have until 31st December 2012 to arrange for inspection hatches to be fitted; from 1st January 2013, registered gas engineers working on a boiler which has a concealed flue that cannot be inspected will be required to condemn it as unsafe.

ARMA's guidance says:

If a property has concealed gas flues and no inspection hatches, taking action sooner rather than later could save lives:-

- For properties less than 2 years old contact the original developer/builder for assistance with the retrofitting of inspection hatches and repair of any flue defects.
- For properties between 2 and 10 years old contact the home warranty provider as cover may be provided by them if there are defects in the flue.
- For properties 10 years or older contact a Gas Safe registered engineer
- If the flue from a boiler goes through other flats in the same block, bring the matter to the attention of the managing agent, landlord or resident management company as soon as possible.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Formed in 1991, ARMA is the only body in England and Wales to focus exclusively on matters relating to the management of long leasehold residential property. The association has over 260 firms in membership that between them manage some 900,000 units in more than 34,000 blocks of flats or estates (at least 60% of which are lessee-controlled properties). ARMA's founding principal aims are to represent its members and the interests of lessees, resident management companies and investor freeholders. More information on the association can be found at www.arma.org.uk.
2. ARMA's advisory note *Flues in Voids* can be downloaded for free from www.arma.org.uk.
3. Gas Safety Week is being run by Gas Safe Register from 12th-18th September to raise awareness of gas safety and the importance of taking care of gas appliances. More information can be found at www.gassaferegister.co.uk.
4. Press release in Word format available on request

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