

Note: One of ARMA's key roles is to provide its members with technical support. However, from time to time, technical or other issues arise where guidance for lessees as well as their property manager is deemed appropriate. Such guidance is contained in these Lessee Advisory Notes (LANs) which ARMA members can copy and distribute to their clients and lessees as appropriate.

SUMMARY

- The Health and Safety Executive has issued advice about certain types of gas boiler flue systems installed in voids-usually in the ceiling.
- The purpose of the warning is to raise awareness of the potential dangers from certain types of flues connected to gas-fired central heating installations in some properties particularly, but not exclusively, a large number of flats and apartments completed since about 2000.
- Do you have a gas fired boiler located away from external walls? Then flues are more likely to run through ceiling (or wall) voids and you need to follow the advice here as given by the HSE.
- There is not necessarily any immediate danger from such flues in voids but you do need to act now to make sure the flues are safe.

BACKGROUND

The introduction of fan-flued gas appliances in the mid 1990s allowed gas central heating boilers to be installed away from external walls. This meant that builders could design new-build and refurbishment properties with boilers being installed on internal walls to make better use of the available space. The flues to these boilers were, in some cases, routed through voids in the ceiling space (and through stud walls) between properties above.

This practice became progressively more popular from 2000 onwards and the vast majority of affected systems are thought to be located in new build flats and apartments completed since 2000. It is however possible that other types of home may have similar central heating systems installed. For example flats where older flue systems were proving inadequate and therefore fan assisted flues were added later.

Revised technical guidance issued in January 2011 requires inspection hatches to be fitted in properties where the flue is concealed within voids and cannot be inspected. A homeowner has until **31st December 2012** to arrange for inspection hatches to be installed. Any gas engineer working on affected systems after **1st January 2013** will advise the homeowner that the system is "at risk" and with the owner's permission will turn off the gas supply to the boiler so it cannot be used.

In the interim period, where no inspection hatches are fitted, registered gas engineers will carry out a simple risk assessment which should ensure that the risk from exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) is managed in the short-term. This risk assessment includes:

- looking for signs of leakage along the flue route; and
- carrying out a flue combustion analysis check and obtaining a satisfactory result; and
- checking for the presence of suitable audible carbon monoxide (CO) alarms and installing such alarms where they are not already fitted.

As long as a boiler passes the series of safety checks and the risk assessment does not identify any concerns about its safety, it can be left on. Suitable inspection hatches will however need to be fitted to the ceiling (or wall, as appropriate) by end 31st December 2012. Wherever possible it is recommended that inspection hatches are fitted before this date.

If you are unsure whether your home has concealed gas flues and think you might be at risk:

- Speak to the Gas Safe registered engineer who last serviced your boiler and he/she will be able to advise whether this applies to your property.
- If you do NOT have your boiler regularly serviced arrange for a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit to check the appliances and flues urgently.

If a property has concealed flues in voids and no inspection hatches:

- 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 you may be covered by them if there are defects in the flue. The main warranty providers (NHBC, Premier Guarantee and Zurich Building Guarantee) have however advised that cover is not provided for installing inspection hatches in homes over two years old.
- For properties 10 years or older you should contact a Gas Safe registered engineer. You will have to meet the cost of the inspection hatches and any defects to the boiler or its flue. It may still be worth contacting the home builder who may be able to assist in some way, or be able to recommend reputable building services companies to carry out the work.

Having taken advice as above, arrange for a competent builder or building services company to fit inspection hatches as soon as you can and, in any case, by 31st December 2012. If you don't, from 1st January 2013 a Gas Safe registered engineer will advise you that the appliance is "at risk" and, with your permission, will turn off the appliance; they will tell you it should not be used until inspection hatches are fitted so that the flue can be checked for safety.

Do not:

- Attempt to check the flue system yourself unless you are a Gas Safe registered engineer. You are likely to do more harm to the installation and place you and your family at greater risk.
- Try to install inspection hatches yourself. You may damage other key functions of the ceiling, such as fire and noise proofing.

If you live in rented accommodation (and are not the owner of a leasehold flat) and think your property might be affected:

- Bring this matter to the attention of your landlord. It is the responsibility of the landlord to ensure that inspection hatches are installed and that the boiler and flue are checked every year.

What If the Flues from My Boiler Go 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.

If you think you are suffering the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning:

- Turn the appliance off immediately and contact the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999.
- If you think you or your family experience any of the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning you should seek urgent medical advice from either your GP or an accident and emergency department.

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Association of Residential Managing Agents Limited (ARMA)
178 Battersea Park Road, London SW11 4ND
Tel: 020 7978 2607 Fax: 020 7498 6153
Email: info@arma.org.uk Website: www.arma.org.uk

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