



INFORMATION NOTE

Changes to industry guidance for boiler flues in voids

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Who Should Read this: CEstOs, Top Level Budget Holders, MOD Project Managers, SETLs & SEATs, Organisations appointing Authorising Engineers (AE) including: Commanding Officers/Heads of Establishment, Defence Estates (DE) Deputy Heads (Estates), DHE, DTE, DE Intl, DE Advisors and Maintenance Management Organisations.

When it takes effect: Immediately

When it is due to expire:
3 February 2012

Health, Safety & Environment

1. Document aim:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have issued (2nd December 2010) a bulletin (OPSTD 10-2010) to update information made available in their Alert 021008.

The purpose of the original HSE Alert (Oct. 2008) was 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) that may not have been installed properly, or may have fallen into disrepair.

Where boilers are located away from external walls, flues are more likely to run through ceiling (or wall) voids. In such cases when the gas appliance is serviced or maintained it can be difficult, or impossible, to determine whether the flue has been installed correctly or whether it is still in good condition.

2. Background:

Gas engineers are legally required to check the flue after carrying out any work on the boiler. This will include a visual inspection. Similarly, when an engineer installs a boiler they need to ensure that it can be used without constituting a danger to anyone; this would include checking whether the flue is safe.

The original installer and every subsequent servicing or maintenance engineer need to be able to check that:

- the flue is continuous throughout its length;

- all joints are correctly assembled and are appropriately sealed; and
- the flue is adequately supported

Unless the gas engineer can make these checks they cannot ensure that the flue from the boiler is safe in order to comply with their legal duties. This necessitates the provision of appropriate inspection hatches in the ceiling (and, where relevant, stud wall).

The original industry technical guidance advised that where the flue to the boiler was concealed within a void and could not be visually inspected it should be assessed as "not to current standards" in accordance with the Gas Industry Unsafe Situations Procedure (GIUSP). This was dependent on there being no other risks being present which may have made the boiler unsafe.

Revised guidance takes effect on 1st January 2011. This is the result of the industry working group who undertook a review of the original guidance and concluded that the potential risk from such systems, should it not be possible to inspect the flue, requires an alternative approach to ensure that the necessary remedial action is taken.

3. Further action:

The revised technical guidance requires inspection hatches to be fitted in properties where the flue is concealed within voids and cannot be inspected. The homeowner (or landlord etc.) 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" in accordance with the GIUSP 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, the 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 CO alarms (**and installing such alarms where they are not already fitted**).

As long as this 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, as appropriate, by end 31st December 2012. Wherever possible it is recommended that inspection hatches are fitted before this date.

Once inspection hatches have been fitted, the gas engineer will be able to make sure that the flue is safe and was installed in line with the relevant standards and manufacturers instructions.

4. References:

The Health and Safety Executive's Safety Notice OPSTD 10-2010 (issued 2nd December 2010) is an update to a previous HSE Safety Alert (issued 2nd October 2008) concerning 'changes to industry guidance relating to existing gas central heating systems where the flue system is concealed within a void and cannot be visually inspected [the void] will require provision of inspection hatches before 31st December 2012.' It is available on this link:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/fluesinvoids.htm?ebul=safbul/2-dec-10&cr=1>

The HSE Safety Alert (issued 2nd October 2008) is available on this link:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/alert021008.htm>