

Title: HSE Safety Alert on gas appliance flue systems in voids

Date issued: 2 December 2010

Note: This version of Safety Alert (SA) 0001 replaces the version last published 1 April 2009 which is now withdrawn. This version has been reviewed and republished to coincide with the publication of an HSE Safety Notice and also the publication of TB 008. It was updated to revise references on 8 August 2013.

This Gas Safe Register Safety Alert has been updated to highlight the publication of a Safety Notice published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) concerning the safety of certain appliance flue systems. The purpose of this Safety Alert is to raise awareness of Gas Safe registered businesses/engineers to a potential carbon monoxide poisoning risk

Introduction and Background

On 2 October 2008, the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain (GB) (HSE) issued a safety alert aimed at builders and developers, managing agents, landlords and occupiers of residential properties with gas central heating boilers sited on internal walls. The purpose of the alert was to raise awareness of a potential poisoning risk. Industry guidance has now been published (TB 008 Edition 3) and a Safety Notice has been published by HSE (see below [Current situation – updated guidance](#)).

The risk arises from a particular arrangement of flues for certain gas appliances including gas boilers, most commonly found in multi-storey flats and apartments built since 2000, which may have a flue that runs through the ceiling void. HSE has become aware that some flues may not have been installed properly, or may have fallen into disrepair.

If the flue is not in good condition, this could affect the performance of the boiler, which if not working efficiently, may produce high levels of carbon monoxide (CO). These fumes may then enter the ceiling void through any breaks in the flue (e.g. if joints are not correctly made or sealed properly) and into the living spaces above or below, placing occupants at risk of CO poisoning.

When commissioning, servicing or maintaining boilers, Gas Safe registered engineers need to be able to visually check the flue system. Where a flue runs through a ceiling or similar void, access panels should be provided at strategic locations. Recently built properties may not have been provided with access and therefore it is not possible to tell if the flue was correctly installed or has subsequently deteriorated.

HSE is working with property developers, the gas industry and construction trade associations to try and establish how many properties may have been built with flues in ceiling voids but without means of access for inspection and to agree appropriate action. Relevant Government departments have also been alerted.

In the meantime, HSE's advice to property owners and landlords is to ensure gas appliances are serviced and maintained at least annually by a competent, Gas Safe registered engineer.

HSE also recommends the use of carbon monoxide alarms as a supplementary measure.

The HSE Safety Alert gives advice on potential warning signs; what owners or tenants should do if they think they may be at risk; relevant legal requirements; key actions for property developers and sources of further information. The Safety Alert can be found on HSE's website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/alert021008.htm>

Current situation – updated guidance

On 2 December 2010, the HSE in GB has issued an updated Safety Notice aimed at:

- Homeowners and tenants of properties with a gas boiler;
- Landlords (private and social) and Managing Agents;
- Gas industry (Gas Safe registered businesses/engineers; gas appliance manufacturers; gas emergency service providers);
- Construction (home builders) and,
- Local Authorities (Housing) etc.

The purpose of the new HSE Safety Notice is to provide updated information to that given in the Safety Alert that was previously issued by the HSE, following a death earlier that year, in order to make homeowners, landlords and tenants aware of these changes as action might be required.

Note 1: *The HSE Safety Notice can be found on HSE's website at:*

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/fluesinvoids.htm>

Note 2: *Although the Safety Notice applies to GB, similar requirements apply in other geographical areas covered by Gas Safe Register, where the guidance is regarded as 'best practice'.*

Gas Safe Register has published a range of guidance on this topic aimed at both consumers

(<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/help-and-advice/gas-safety-in-the-home/get-your-appliances-checked/flues-in-voids/>) and engineers

(<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/engineer/resource-hub/flues-in-voids/>). The key engineer guidance is Technical Bulletin (TB) 008⁽¹⁾ (of which Edition 3 supersedes all earlier editions).

Gas Safe Register has also now produced an 'On Demand Learning package' for registered businesses/engineers which is available at:

<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/engineer/resource-hub/online-learning/> where they can login to access the package.

Bibliography

(1) TB 008 (Edition 3) - Existing concealed room-sealed fanned-draught boiler chimney/flue systems

Note: Gas Safe Register Technical Bulletins can be viewed at: <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/sign-in/> - login and visit the Technical Information area.

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