



ADVICE NOTE

GAS BOILERS AND FLUE SAFETY

Important safety information about concealed gas boiler flues



Note:

As the leading trade body for residential leasehold management, ARMA is also an important resource for leaseholders. Our Advice Notes cover a range of topics on the leasehold system to help leaseholders understand their rights and responsibilities and ultimately get the most out of living in their flat.

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SUMMARY

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a safety warning about the potential dangers of certain types of gas boiler flue systems that run through ceiling or wall voids — usually in blocks of flats.

If you have a gas fired boiler that's located away from the external walls of your home, then the flues are more likely to run through a ceiling or wall void. So you need to follow the advice given by the HSE, which we've summarised here.

BACKGROUND

The introduction of fan-flued gas appliances in the mid 1990s meant that gas central heating boilers could be installed away from the external walls of buildings.

Developers took advantage of this to design new and refurbished properties with boilers installed on internal walls, allowing them to make better use of space. The flues to these boilers were, in some cases, routed through voids in the ceiling spaces and through walls between flats above.

The practice became progressively more popular from 2000 onwards so the vast majority of affected systems are thought to be located in new build flats. Other types of home may still be affected though — for example older flats where the heating systems were fitted with new fan assisted flues.

Inspection hatches must now be fitted in all properties with concealed gas flues in voids.

Gas engineers must be able to visually inspect the flue. If they can't, they 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 can't be used.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CHECK THE FLUE SYSTEM YOURSELF UNLESS YOU ARE A GAS SAFE REGISTERED ENGINEER. YOU COULD DO MORE HARM TO THE INSTALLATION AND PLACE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AT GREATER RISK.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

If you're unsure whether your home has concealed gas flues and you think you may be at risk:

- Speak to the Gas Safe registered engineer who last serviced your boiler. They will be able to advise whether this applies to your property.
- If you don't have your boiler regularly serviced, arrange for a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit to check the appliances and flues urgently.

If your property has concealed flues and no inspection hatches:

- For properties less than two years old, contact the original developer or builder for assistance with retrofitting inspection hatches and repairing flue defects.
- For properties between two and 10 years old, contact your home warranty provider as you may be covered 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 that are over two years old.
- For properties 10 years or older, you should contact a Gas Safe registered engineer. You will have to pay for the installation of any inspection hatches and repairs to the boiler or its flue. It may still be worth contacting the homebuilder, as they may be able to assist in some way or recommend reputable building services companies to carry out the work.

If you're renting your flat and think your property might be affected:

- Bring this matter to the attention of your landlord. It's their responsibility to ensure that inspection hatches are installed and that the boiler and flues are checked every year. If the engineer can't inspect the flues, or necessary hatches haven't been fitted, then the engineer will turn the boiler off.

If the flues from your boiler go through other flats in the building:

- If the flue serves only your boiler, it's likely that you'll be responsible for installing the inspection hatches. But this will depend on the leases so it's best to speak to your landlord or managing agent first.

Do not:

- Attempt to check the flue system yourself unless you are a Gas Safe registered engineer. You could 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 elements of the building such as fire and noise proofing.



ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO HAVING INSPECTION HATCHES FITTED?

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You can buy devices that monitor the presence of carbon monoxide in wall and ceiling voids and will shut off the boiler if it's detected. However, Gas Safe still recommends inspection hatches wherever possible. Here's their advice:

“Visual examination checks by engineers via inspection hatches is currently the preferred method recommended by the industry guidance that explains how to judge that a flue is working safely and effectively. However, where inspection hatches are not practicable industry has developed a safety system which is able to monitor the void for the presence of carbon monoxide and which cause the boiler to shut down if it is detected.”

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 are experiencing any of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, you should seek urgent medical advice from either your GP or an accident and emergency department.

More information

Gas Safe have lots of information for consumers on their website:

www.gassaferegister.co.uk

You can also read the HSE safety bulletin on concealed gas flues on their website: www.hse.gov.uk

Note:

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this ARMA Advisory Note, it must be emphasised that because the Association has no control over the precise circumstances in which it will be used, the Association, its officers, employees and members can accept no liability arising out of its use, whether by members of the Association or otherwise.

The ARMA Advisory Note is of a general nature only and makes no attempt to state or conform to legal requirements; compliance with these must be the individual user's own responsibility and therefore it may be appropriate to seek independent advice.