



GAS, ELECTRICITY AND WATER SUPPLY SAFETY

GAS

Gas appliances such as ovens, hobs, boilers and radiators must be properly installed and regularly maintained. In terms of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998, a duty is imposed on employers and landlords to ensure that all gas appliances and installation pipework installed at any place of work under their control, or premises let by them, are maintained in a safe condition so as to prevent risk of injury to any person. A person subject to this duty must ensure that gas appliances and pipework are checked for safety at least once every twelve months by an approved person.

This duty therefore applies to those responsible for Church premises even if they employ only one person, or let out their Church or Hall only once or twice a year. Most congregations will employ at least one person, perhaps a cleaner or organist, and let out their Church or Hall to other groups. Even if a congregation has no employees and never lets out its premises to other organisations, there is a duty of care towards persons using these premises and accordingly it is strongly recommended that all congregations have gas appliances and pipework serviced once a year.

Records must be kept for each appliance with dates of inspection, defects identified and action taken. Such records should be kept in the congregation's Property Register.

The persons responsible are the charity trustees of a congregation, ie members of the Kirk Session and of the Financial Board, if any. Practical arrangements can be delegated to, say, a Property Group or a Church Officer, who should report to the charity trustees.

It is unlawful for anyone other than a Gas Safe registered engineer to carry out inspections or repairs on gas appliances and pipework. Your engineer should have a Gas Safe Register ID card, and should be asked to show this.

If an appliance is found to be unsafe to use, then it is unlawful to use it before suitable repairs are carried out.

A Manse is regarded as domestic premises, and therefore there is no legal obligation to have gas appliances within the Manse serviced annually. However, it is strongly recommended that appliances and pipework in the Manse be included in the annual safety inspection

If a Manse or other residential property is to be let out to tenants, then the Landlords have a strict responsibility to have gas appliances checked before commencement of the lease and have them maintained and serviced once a year thereafter. It is recommended that advice be obtained from the Law Department on all aspect of letting residential property before doing so.

ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES AND PAT TESTING/

While the regulations regarding electrical appliances are not so strict, there can be a risk of fire or serious injury caused by electrical faults. Wiring will normally be checked at the time of the five yearly inspection of the buildings. Portable appliances, such as kettles, heaters etc, should be

checked on a regular basis to ensure that they are in safe working order. There is no statutory period setting out the frequency of testing - this will depend on the nature of the appliance, and the extent to which it is used, and is a matter of judgement. It is not necessary to employ an electrician to carry out checks on electrical appliances, (PAT testing), but they should be carried out by a “competent person”. It should be quite possible for appliances to be checked by a layman - for example, loose or frayed wires should be dealt with and any smell of burning should be regarded with concern – but if the charity trustees have concerns about testing electric appliances, and there are funds available, then they should employ an electrician. In addition to questions of health and safety, in the event of an incident, the congregation’s insurers will expect to see evidence that regular checks have been carried out. Records should therefore be kept in the Property Register of testing and action taken.

There have been cases where companies have contacted congregations and indicated to them that it is compulsory to carry out PAT testing on all appliances annually. Such testing is not obligatory and these approaches should be treated with caution.

Further guidance is available on the website of the Health and Safety Executive, www.hse.gov.uk, and the Law Department is happy to give advice on specific matters.

HEATING AND WATER SUPPLY INSTALLATIONS GENERALLY

Irrespective of any statutory responsibility, charity trustees should ensure that any premises for which they are responsible, are in as safe a condition as is reasonably practicable. It is common sense to let water run for a period from taps which have not been used for a while.

The Church of Scotland General Trustees retain the services of a Heating and Energy Consultant who has recommended that the following procedures should be carried out annually and when premises previously vacant are about to be reoccupied :-

- (1) The complete heating installation should be examined for water, oil or gas leaks.
- (2) The feed and expansion tank and open vents should be examined and any faults rectified.
- (3) Isolating and control valves should be set to the proper position.
- (4) The chimney boiler flue passages should be cleaned, examined and any damage repaired.
- (5) The free air inlets to the boiler plant room should be examined and increased if below the boiler manufacturer's requirements.
- (6) The boiler(s) should be commissioned in accordance with manufacturers' data using flue gas testing equipment where appropriate.
- (7) An operational check should be carried out on the complete installation and should include the testing of boiler thermostats, safety valves, safety fuel cutoff devices, chimney draught, fuel flow rate, automatic controls and general heat distribution.

The Consultant has also made the following comments with regard to a case where serious illness arose following water contamination where a vacant Manse was re-occupied. The water contamination was linked to an incorrectly installed vent pipe from the heating installation and the Consultant has advised that implementation of the above procedures should have prevented contamination arising.

Additionally, the Consultant has recommended the following procedures for premises about to be occupied after a period of vacancy :-

- (1) The incoming main water supply pipe should be examined and any lead pipe work be replaced in accordance with Water Supply By-laws (Local Authority grants may be available for this work.)
- (2) The distribution pipework within the building should be examined and any lead pipework replaced with copper or other approved materials.
- (3) The water storage tank(s) should be examined, drained, cleaned, disinfected and flushed out. The tank(s) should be fitted with proper ventilated covers in accordance with Water Supply By-laws.

It is recognised that it may not always be practicable to replace lead pipework and (where Local Authority grants are not available) such may be beyond the means of some congregations. Any major replacement work should be approved in advance by both Presbytery and the General Trustees.

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