Gas Guide

Dealing with Gas Problems:

Boiler/Heating Insurance

If you would like the security of having your boiler and central heating maintained regularly and the peace of mind that someone will come out and carry out repairs if it breaks down then you may like to consider insurance.

Your own gas supplier may offer this but you are able to take out cover from another supplier if it suits you better. Some covers can include not just your heating but a complete package which covers your plumbing and electrics too.

If your system is old or you are not confident that you would be able to resolve a possible problem yourself, it may be worth considering this option.

Common problems you may have with your central heating system and how you might fix them.

Radiators:

Before winter sets in, you should ensure your heating system is working correctly. Ideally you should have had your heating on at regular intervals during the summer so that system continues to work efficiently.

To test your radiators are working correctly, switch on the heating and make sure that the heat is spread evenly throughout each radiator. Ensure that the valves are fully turned on, on each radiator.

The radiator is making a noise:

If your radiators or heating system seem to be making a noise then it may mean that there is air trapped somewhere. You should check the water tank in your loft, if it is easily accessible; to make sure that there is enough water in it and that it is filling up correctly. If there is water in the tank or you do not have a tank, but a combination boiler then the problem is probably in the radiators, which can be fixed by bleeding them.

The Radiator is warm at the bottom but cold at the top:

If the radiators are warm at the bottom but cold at the top, then this may also mean that there is air trapped in the top section so you will need to bleed them.

It is simple to **bleed your radiators**; you simply need to let the air out of the radiator by turning the radiator key. As you turn the key, air will be released, the water will push its way to the top, removing all the excess air and once a small amount of water comes out of the valve you should turn the key back. You should have a cloth ready in case the water is hot and to avoid any spillage.

The Radiator is cold at the bottom but warm at the top:

If the radiator is cold at the bottom and warm at the top and this problem persists, then there may be some sludge at the bottom of the radiator and it may need flushing out. For this, the radiator will need to be taken off the wall, flushed out with water and refitted. This can be done by yourself if you follow the correct instructions and have a basic understanding of how your heating system works but if you have not done it before or are unsure of the procedure, then you will need to call a plumber or engineer out.

If several of your radiators have this problem and it is not solved by flushing the radiator out then the problem may be more serious. This could be caused by a fault with the circulating pump, blocked pipes or radiators or a badly designed system. You will need to call a professional out to look at this problem further as it may require the whole system to be flushed through or repairs to be carried out.

The radiator is working correctly but not at the desired temperature.

If your radiators are working correctly but are not hot enough or are too hot then you can alter the temperature by either adjusting the controls on your boiler or for more modern radiators with their own temperature controls, simply turn up or down accordingly.

Insulation

Insulating your house properly can save you money on your heating bills and insulating your heating system properly can save you the inconvenience and money of it breaking down.

There are a few things you can do yourself to ensure your system runs well through the winter. Insulating your water tank and your pipes can prevent them from freezing up. Your water tank - usually up in your loft should have

an insulating jacket on and water pipes, especially in places more exposed to the cold should have pipe insulation on them. Preventing your pipes and water tank from freezing could save you on expensive repair bills.

For extra protection against the cold you can also get a frost thermostat fitted which will automatically turn your boiler on if the temperature drops below a certain level. This can give you the peace of mind if you are away for any period during the winter as a safeguard against the system freezing. It is not recommended to switch your heating off completely if you are away during the winter as if you do not have a frost thermostat you could come back to frozen pipes.

Loss of pressure in your system:

For a system to work properly the water pressure should remain constant. Modern combination boilers are pressurised systems and water will enter the system from the mains cold water supply through a manual filling device, known as a ‘filling loop’. Adding water via the filling loop to the system after a drop of pressure will help bring your system to the correct pressure again.

There are several factors which may contribute to a loss of pressure in your heating system. It could be as a result of a water leak or air removed from the system when the radiators have been bled or removed and replaced. You check the pressure after bleeding or removing the radiators and if you notice a drop of pressure then the system will need to be topped up with water.

Water leaks will also cause a drop of pressure , leaks can be very small and go unnoticed as pressure can decrease over a couple of months. Small leaks are quite hard to detect as the water evaporates quickly. If you think there is a leak, you should check the system thoroughly when it is cold especially around the radiator and boiler valves. Larger leaks will mean that you will need to regularly refill the system; these should be repaired as soon as possible.

You can check the pressure of the system by using the pressure gauge which you should find on your boiler. You should check this gauge regularly to make sure it is at the correct pressure. It should be between the 1 and 1.5 bar. It should not drop below 0.5 or rise above 2.5.

If the pressure is too low then you need to re-pressurise the system by topping it up via the filling loop. This is usually a small tap connected to the system via a metal hose. If the hose is not connected to the system you will need to remove the cap,the end and attach and tighten it. Once attached, you need to turn the tap, whilst watching the gauge and let enough water in to raise the gauge to the correct level (1-1.5bar).

The filling loop will always be located near to the boiler but if you can't see it straight away it may be in a cupboard or perhaps behind a boarded section. If you cannot find the filling loop, consult your manufacturer's booklet or ask your service engineer.

Gas emergencies

Gas leak:

Gas is usually a safe and easy way to heat your house but it can also be potentially dangerous if a leak occurs or an appliance is faulty.

If you smell gas or think that you may have a gas leak somewhere then you should call National Grid Gas Emergencies on 0800 111 999 straight away. Open your windows and doors to let air in, make sure all gas appliances are turned off and turn the gas off at the mains if possible. Do not turn lights on or off and avoid using other electrical switches and appliances as this could trigger an explosion. Do not smoke, light a match or any other naked flame.

Do not try and investigate the problem or attempt to fix a leak or a faulty appliance.

Loss of gas supply

Although very rarely, there may be times when National Grid may have to interrupt the supply of gas to your home.
They promise to give customers sufficient notice of any interruption, keep interruption to a minimum and make interruption requests on an equitable basis.

Reasons for interruptions can include network capacity constraints, high system demands, testing and other emergency situations. The National Grid has to keep certain standards of performance and these state that they must notify customers of planned interruptions an in the result of an unplanned

interruption, such as an emergency, they must restore the supply as soon as is possible.

Compensation may be available if they do not meet these standards and payments will be made to you either via your gas suppliers or from National Grid directly.

Carbon Monoxide poisoning

Carbon monoxide poisoning causes a number of accidental deaths every year when gad appliances are installed incorrectly, badly maintained or poorly ventilated. It is so deadly as you cannot see, smell it or taste it. Being exposed to carbon monoxide can cause brain damage and even death.

All appliances should be safety checked and maintained and it is especially important if you live in rented accommodation that the landlord checks and maintains any gas appliances. This is a legal requirement.

Although carbon monoxide is invisible and difficult to detect, there are ways that you can see whether an appliance (fires, heaters, central heating boilers, water heaters or cookers) may be dangerous. These include:

- The pilot light continually blowing out
- An orange and yellow flame rather than a blue one
- A black, brown or scorched area on an appliance
- A musty smell or signs of soot
- More condensation than normal on windows

To keep your house safe and check for the presence of carbon monoxide you can use a carbon monoxide detector. These detectors sense if there is any carbon monoxide in the air and change colour or set an alarm off to warn you. You can buy detectors in hardware or DIY stores and you should make sure that it meets the correct standard before purchasing it. The label should display BS 7860 in Britain, showing it is officially approved by the CO Alarm Standards. You should test your detector every month and replace batteries when necessary. Detectors don't last forever so you replace them as recommended by the manufacturer.

Don't ever ignore the detector and if you suspect carbon monoxide is present in your home then you should evacuate everyone immediately.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can include: headaches, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, diarrhoea, stomach pains, chest pains and erratic behaviour. A faulty gas appliance can cause these symptoms and you should be wary if the symptoms worsen when a gas appliance is in use and if the symptoms lessen when away from the house but then return again when you are back in the property.

Gas safety tips

Gas, when not used carefully, is a potentially dangerous source of energy. Following are a number of tips about making sure the gas supply in your home is safe:

- The best way to be sure about your gas appliances is to have them checked regularly by your gas supplier, or by a Corgi Registered Installer. Corgi are the national watchdog for gas safety.
- NEVER tamper with gas appliances yourself.
- If you are in rented accommodation, it is your landlord's responsibility to ensure that all appliances are maintained properly. If you have any concerns about appliances in rented accommodation, talk to your landlord.
- Poorly maintained gas appliances (in particular gas fires) can emit Carbon monoxide, an odourless, colourless and potentially fatal gas. Carbon Monoxide detectors can be bought relatively cheaply from most good electrical and home stores to alert you if carbon monoxide is present in your home.
- If your carbon monoxide detector shows a presence of carbon monoxide, switch off your gas supply and call National Grid's emergency number IMMEDIATELY on 0800 111 999
- If you smell gas, or think you have a gas leak in your home, turn off your gas supply, do not switch any electrical appliances on or off, or bring naked flames into your home, and call National Grid's emergency number IMMEDIATELY on 0800 111 999.

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