

Important Alert for Gasfitters

The Office of Gas Safety (OGS) alerts gasfitters that all open-flued instantaneous gas water heaters (IGWH) in toilets and bathrooms should be replaced as a matter of urgency.

Open-flued IGWH's, in a confined living space, can expose gas users to the risk of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. Gasfitters are uniquely placed to help in removing this risk.

This important safety alert follows the death of a young woman in March 2003, in a home of Housing Commission design. The Office of Housing has removed several hundred IGWH's from houses under their management, but OGS estimates there are several thousand in privately-owned houses of the Housing Commission design.

This Alert is not limited to any particular housing type or ownership, and covers all installations in Victoria.

What action has OGS taken so far?

- We have previously warned plumbers and gasfitters not to install a new or replacement open-flued instantaneous water heater in a bedroom, bathroom, toilet or sleeping area (the Gas & Fuel prohibited these installations in 1985).
- We prohibited 'like-for-like' replacement practice in January 2002.
- We are notifying all known addresses where these installations may be in use (see attached **Important Safety Warning** to gas users). Residents are urged to have the IGWH replaced, and to be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms.
- We have arranged with appliance suppliers for a cash back offer, to assist with the financial burden. We are also offering \$250 financial assistance for people in a position of financial hardship (requires health card or pension card to qualify).

What should I do if I find an open-flued instantaneous water heater in a toilet or bathroom?

- Inform residents that the IGWH should be urgently replaced as advised by the OGS.
- Ensure that residents have the **Important Safety Warning** confirming OGS advice, and know of the dangers and symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.
- Inform residents of the arrangements for financial assistance to help with replacement costs.

Don't ignore this warning – carbon monoxide can kill.

How should I proceed with replacement?

- We recognises that it may not be possible to replace the water heater immediately, and the owner/occupier will not want to be without hot water while replacement is being arranged. It is acceptable to leave an appliance in operation for a short time with the pre-existing ventilation, provided the
 - flue is inspected and it is seen to be complete, in good condition and unobstructed
 - fixed ventilation is not obstructed
 - the appliance is working safely under normal conditions (with doors closed and any exhaust fan operating and not operating), and the
 - appliance is set to work and the flue is tested and effective.¹

If the resident refuses to have the water heater replaced what should I do?

- You should immediately notify OGS of the refusal and contact details. OGS will then approach the resident directly.
- You are not empowered to make the water heater inoperative.
- You should leave the **Important Safety Warning** with the resident

The Office of Gas Safety will not hold you accountable for an IGWH remaining in operation if you have followed the procedure above and have

- Informed the resident of the need to replace the IGWH
- Provided the **Important Safety Warning** including the dangers and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning
- Physically inspected the flue and confirmed its integrity and tested the effectiveness of the flue¹
- Notified OGS where a resident/owner refuses to let you replace the appliance.

If you need more information on this important matter, contact OGS on 1800 652 563



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Gardner".

Ken Gardner
Director of Gas Safety

¹OGS Information Sheet 28 – Confirming flue integrity and effectiveness

Don't ignore this warning – carbon monoxide can kill.

**For further information please call the Office of Gas Safety
on 1800 652 563 or visit www.ogs.vic.gov.au**