

Energy Safe Victoria

Media Release

29th April 2019

Victorians need to 'Be Sure' their gas heaters are safe ahead of winter

As Victoria edges closer to winter, Energy Safe Victoria is urging everyone with a gas heater to get it serviced by a qualified gasfitter as soon as possible.

According to ESV research, 65 per cent of Victorians have ducted gas heating or fixed gas space heaters. But only half (48 per cent) will take action to ensure they are safe from not only carbon monoxide poisoning but many other faults that can occur with heaters.

Victoria's Director of Energy Safety Paul Fearon said that servicing by a qualified gasfitter (endorsed in Type A appliance servicing work) at least once every two years, was the best way for people to protect themselves from carbon monoxide poisoning.

"It was only last year ESV sat through the harrowing coroner's inquiry into the death of Sonia Sofianopoulos who was tragically killed by carbon monoxide poisoning in her Greensborough home," he said.

"Not even a decade has passed since the two Robinson boys, Chase and Tyler, were killed and their mother Vanessa was lucky to survive carbon monoxide poisoning in Mooroopna.

"Also, carbon monoxide poisoning doesn't always have fatal consequences. Many more people will be suffering long-term health effects from lower level but chronic exposure. The only way to protect yourself and your family this is to look after your gas heaters, get them serviced and minimise the risk."

Alongside Vanessa Robinson – who has tirelessly campaigned for carbon monoxide awareness since the deaths of her children – Mr Fearon today launched the 'Be Sure' campaign, which aims to get Victorians to take action, get their heaters serviced and understand how to manage them during the colder months.

The launch coincides with the beginning of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week (29th April – 4th May), an initiative of The Chase & Tyler Foundation, which is led by Ms Robinson.

"Our research shows that 67 per cent of Victorians know about carbon monoxide and how dangerous it can be. But it also shows that less than half will take action to make sure their heater is safe," Mr Fearon said.

"We don't want people to suffer from cold but equally, those with an open flued gas heater need to practice some basic steps, such as ensuring there is adequate ventilation and not running exhaust fans at the same time as the heater."

The 'Be Sure' campaign asks people to take action so that they can be sure their heater is safe.

"Regular servicing will pick up any issues with the gas heater. It will also ensure your heater runs efficiently and that you remain safe and well. Ideally, get your heater serviced before the winter sets in and you start using the heater regularly," Mr Fearon said.

"The message is particularly important for people with an open flued gas heater in a newer home. Newer homes tend to be better sealed, resulting in less ventilation. Remember, carbon monoxide can harm anyone."

Mr Fearon said that ESV had worked with a number of suppliers who have now published Safety Alerts for some of their products due to defects, which have the potential to cause carbon monoxide spillage. This includes installation problems and split heat exchangers.

For more information visit www.esv.vic.gov.au

Victoria's Director of Energy Safety is available for interview. He will also be available at the launch of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week at the Monash Children's Hospital today (29th April) from 10am.

Hosted by the Chase & Tyler Foundation, the launch will take place in the foyer of the Hospital: 246 Clayton Road (entry via, Dixon St), Clayton.

Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week runs from 29th April to 3rd May.

Media contact: Jonathan Granger 0400 948 934 | jonathan.granger@energysafe.vic.gov.au.