

GAS APPLIANCES (CARBON MONOXIDE) SAFETY STRATEGY

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR GAS TECHNICAL REGULATORS COMMITTEE

The Ministerial Council on Energy (MCE)¹ requests that state and territory gas safety regulators (the Gas Technical Regulators Committee (GTRC)) urgently consider the need to develop a gas safety strategy to mitigate the risks of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from household gas appliances and portable gas appliances use in confined (unventilated) spaces such as vehicles or caravans. The draft gas safety strategy will include an assessment of the risks, cost and benefits of the options and provide recommendations on the best way forward for consideration by MCE before the end of June 2011.

The draft gas appliances (carbon monoxide) safety strategy should, through the application of sound engineering and investigative methods, explore and fully consider all relevant factual information on the causes, scale and types of carbon monoxide poisoning events (as they apply to gas appliances), as well as the proposed methods for detection of carbon monoxide in residential premises and recreational vehicles. More specifically, this work should include:

- a) a review of the range of commercially available carbon monoxide detectors to determine the reliability and effectiveness given the cost;
- b) examination of international practice concerning the compulsory use of carbon monoxide detectors;
- c) consideration of the service life, operational and maintenance requirements of detectors (including dual smoke and carbon monoxide detectors currently available on the market);
- d) the feasibility, costs and benefits for all residential properties and recreational vehicles with gas appliances to be fitted with approved carbon monoxide detectors, including determining the minimum number of detectors per residence and the effectiveness of the detectors' outputs (after detection, raise alarm or shutdown of the gas supply, or both);
- e) the feasibility, costs and benefits of a requirement for detectors to be installed at all residential rental properties where gas appliances are installed, and the feasibility, costs and benefits of requiring that these appliances be inspected by qualified contractors at certain intervals [eg. every 12, 24 or 36 months];
- f) ways to promote greater safety awareness, alerting all Australians to the dangers and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and the need to regularly service household gas appliances;
- g) the identification of training and workforce requirements to meet any recommendations, such as increasing the number of trained gas fitters to undertake safety checks or licencing of tradespersons;

¹ As at 10 June 2011, MCE will become the joint Standing Council on Energy and Resources in accordance with COAG reforms.

- h) the effects of lower than atmospheric (negative) indoor pressures on the performance of gas appliances created by bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans and the effects on creating an environment conducive to carbon monoxide poisoning;
- i) if (h) finds that the installation of extraction fans in buildings contributes to negative pressures, the effectiveness of developing a requirement as part of the Building Codes of Australia to prevent negative pressures resulting from extraction fans should be assessed; and
- j) any other options that may mitigate the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning from household or portable gas appliances.

Following MCE approval of the draft strategy, the GTRC will consult with affected and interested stakeholders to inform the preparation of a Consultation Regulation Impact Statement covering the contents of the draft strategy (items (a) to (j) above). This will allow the presentation of the final gas safety strategy and Decision Regulation Impact Statement, including a cost benefit analysis of the recommendations, to Ministers for consideration, noting that the Parliamentary House of Representatives considers this work urgent, and with a view to putting the strategy into effect at the earliest opportunity.