

ASCP Group Launches 'COVID or Compliance' Campaign, Calling on Government to Support Gas Service Extension

The Association of Safety and Compliance Professionals (ASCP) has joined forces with CORGI Technical Services to launch a nationwide campaign, in a bid to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus across social housing.

Calling on the Government to support the social housing sector, both organisations have come together in partnership with social landlords across the UK, to campaign for an extension to regulatory gas services and safety check deadlines to be granted.

The ASCP, who through its 800 members is responsible for gas safety in over 2.5 million social homes, has received an avalanche of industry support from local authorities and housing associations, with hundreds responding to highlight their concerns and add their weight by also contacting their local MPs for support.

Despite the Government issuing strong guidance against entering homes of vulnerable people and following social distancing measures, as yet there has been no extension to gas servicing deadlines, so that housing associations are obliged to pursue tenants in order to carry out routine regulatory gas compliance checks.

With concerns that these gas safety checks could potentially increase the risk of community transmission, the ASCP estimates that 666,667 regulatory gas safety checks are scheduled to take place in the next 8 weeks – this highlights the significant impact these guidelines would have in the battle to contain the outbreak. With an average of two tenants and an engineer usually in the home during such checks, the result would be 2 million unnecessary social interactions taking place within the next two months.

Commenting on the launch of the COVID or Compliance Campaign, CEO of the ASCP and CORGI Technical Services, Claire Heyes, said: 'The Government's guidance to date has not been conclusive, firmly putting the choice of compliance or COVID-19 contagion on the

landlord to determine priorities. With most landlords focused on compliance and upholding the law, they now face a troubling dilemma. Clearly, there is conflict here with the Government mandate around “essential” work.

‘Gas appliances found within social housing properties are known to be the safest in the UK, largely due to the fact their boilers are serviced, and safety checked annually. Landlords also have regular replacement programmes and repairs are carried out in a timely manner. We estimate on average boilers are approximately less than 6 years old and in good condition. In addition, many properties have a carbon monoxide alarm, unlike the general state of private ownership, which are potentially a higher risk in this respect, due to the lack of compulsory servicing or safety checks.

‘Against this backdrop, we’ve launched this industry leading campaign alongside CORGI Technical Services, as we feel a collective duty to do all we can to limit the spread of the virus. With the majority of our members clearly stating that they’ve been unable to gain access to carry out the landlord gas safety checks, as tenants are self-isolating, it’s time for the Government to support an extension to the usual 12-month timeframe.

‘What we’re asking for is a measured and swift response, which we’ve already seen in the extension of MOT services, to help social housing providers protect their communities but also make sure they aren’t wrongly penalised for not upholding annual gas safety checks.’

The recommendations proposed by the ASCP include:

1. All non-emergency work to be suspended. Including the routine annual gas safety check, under Regulation 36 of the Gas Safety Regulations.
2. A short-term, minimum extension of 3 months to be granted, although 6 months would be more practical to deal with backlogs. This measure has been approved within the motor vehicle section, with automatic 6-month MOT exemptions granted.
3. A relaxation period, adopting a “light touch” approach to non-compliance by the Regulator of Social Housing for the remainder of 2020, to safely clear backlogs.

4. Housing providers must still visit any emergencies, repairs, or issues considered dangerous.
5. Additionally, residents should have the right to request a gas safety check when due and practical to complete, providing that a risk assessment has been carried out.

To join the COVID or Compliance Campaign & support calls for the Government to extend regulatory gas services and safety check timeframes, please see:

<http://www.agsm.uk.com/covid-or-compliance-campaign/>

The ASCP Group provides a wide range of professional membership services and benefits to people responsible for managing wider safety and compliance issues across the social housing and facilities management sector, with its organisation incorporating the Association of Gas Safety Managers (AGSM) and the Association of Electrical Safety Managers (AESM), in partnership with CORGI Technical Services.

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Media contacts:

Hannah@conkercommunications.com

Sarah@conkercommunications.com

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