

CER Press Release – 9th November 2012

The CER to have increased safety enforcement powers in 2012

The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has today published the 2011 Natural Gas Safety Framework Report. The report is issued by the CER setting out the safety performance of the Natural Gas industry.

The report highlights new legislation which provides extended enforcement powers to the CER. The CER will be able to issue Improvement and Prohibition Notices to licenced gas undertakings when the new legal functions come into effect. Issued notices will set out requirements for safety improvement and where necessary, prohibit licensees from carrying out, or continuing, unsafe activities.

Under existing enforcement powers CER obtained two successful convictions in 2012. These followed investigations initiated in 2011, for illegal domestic “Gas Works” carried out by individuals not registered with the RGII (Register of Gas Installers of Ireland). A conviction can result in a fine of up to €25,000 or a prison term if warranted.

Additional new safety functions added in 2011 included the regulation of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) installers with full inclusion within the Registered Gas Installers scheme. Members of the public should now only employ a registered LPG installer who can safely install service or maintain boilers, fires and other appliances.

Whilst no fatalities occurred in 2011 as a direct consequence of Natural Gas, there were a number of worrying trends which will require monitoring and review by the CER. This includes, for example, a rise in accidental damage figures on the distribution network. There was also a worrying increase in gas pipeline encroachments reported.

The CER also aims to promote and raise awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide to both natural gas customers and users of other fossil fuel based appliances in the home. With this in mind the CER has included a section dedicated to Carbon Monoxide in the 2011 annual report. The Promotion and Public Awareness group also agreed to run a Carbon Monoxide awareness week in 2012 with the support of the CER.

Commissioner Garret Blaney of the CER commented:

“The CER continues its commitment to ensuring that all players in the natural gas industry demonstrate that safety is a prime consideration in the operation of their businesses. The CER will use the new and proposed enforcement powers where necessary to further improve safety standards and compliance with the natural gas safety regulatory Framework.”

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For further information, please contact:

Paul McGowan
Phone: 01 4000800 or 086 3844436
E-mail: pmcgowan@cer.ie

Note to Editors:

- The CER is Ireland's independent energy regulator with a wide range of economic, safety and customer protection responsibilities in energy. The CER focus of the CER's energy safety responsibilities is on protecting lives and having a world class energy safety record. For further information please see the CER's website at www.cer.ie, with safety-related information detailed at www.cer.ie/en/safety-overview.aspx.
- The Gas Safety Framework has been put in place by the CER to protect the public from the safety risks that arise from the downstream activities of the various undertakings involved in Liquefied Natural Gas or the supply, storage and transmission and distribution of natural gas, as well as gas installers in Ireland. The following are the main goals of the Framework in relation to these activities:
 - Minimising the risk of loss of containment of gas. i.e. gas leaks from pipelines and pipework;
 - Maintaining a safe system operating pressure of gas in the pipeline network;
 - Minimising the risk of injecting non-conforming quality of gas into the pipeline network;
 - Providing an efficient and coordinated response to gas emergencies;
 - Minimising the safety risks associated with the utilisation of gas;
 - Promoting public awareness of gas safety.

The Framework is the means by which the CER regulates this infrastructure and it enables the CER to ensure that undertakings are managing their safety risks in storage, transmission, distribution, supply and use of natural gas.

- A "pipeline encroachment" refers to unauthorised construction work being carried out within the protected way-leave adjacent to a high pressure gas main. The purpose of the way-leave is to guard the pipeline against accidental damage which could give rise to a fire or explosion and ultimately a potential loss of life. Bord Gais Networks patrol and survey the network routinely to assure against encroachment. Encroachments are classified based on the proximity of the works and the potential for damage to the pipeline.
- The RGII (The Registered Gas Installers of Ireland) is responsible for registering gas installers and regulating their activities with respect to safety. RGII carry out this function on behalf of the CER. For further information and a list of Registered Gas Installers please visit www.rgii.ie or phone 01- 499-7998.
- There are approximately 20,000 Domestic LPG customers within Ireland whose supply is via a bulk tank. An additional 12,500 domestic customers are supplied via central storage/distribution network systems. Over 2,700 gas installers are registered with RGII.