Cooking with Gas: Ensuring Safety in Hospitality Businesses

Introduction

One of the many aspects of operating a hospitality or foodservice business is the selection, installation and regular maintenance of gas appliances and equipment. When installed correctly and properly maintained, gas appliances are safe and efficient kit. However, if equipment is not correctly installed or maintained by qualified professionals, the results can be catastrophic. Gas safety responsibilities aren't limited to chefs; hospitality managers such as landlords (e.g. owners of B&Bs, hotels and all types of rented holiday accommodation) and tenants (e.g. publicans) are subject to gas safety regulations.

The Catering Equipment Distributors Association (CEDA) and the Catering Equipment Suppliers Association (CESA) have compiled this guide and its resources to help hospitality owners and operators obtain gas catering appliances from reputable sources and comply with required health and safety regulations to ensure a safe business and work environment.

Some stark facts

In the UK, the NHS confirms that “more than 50 people die from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning every year, and 200 people are seriously injured.”

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act makes employers responsible for employees’ health and safety at work. Also, the recent Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 means that companies and organisations can now be found criminally liable and guilty of corporate manslaughter if a fatality results from a gross breach of the management’s duty of care in the oversight of health and safety.

Whilst fatalities are the worst aspect of an incident involving gas, some businesses will not survive an incident because both a company’s finances and brand image can be irretrievably damaged if it has been remiss in its health and safety duties.

Hospitality industry

By its very nature, the hospitality and foodservice sector is at a higher risk of being severely affected by unsafe gas work or appliances. The KC Café located on the Rackheath industrial estate, Norfolk, was flattened by a gas explosion in January 2011. The damage and business disruption resulted in costs of more than £1 million to companies on the estate.

In 2011, following the carbon monoxide (CO) death of a girl aged 16 and permanent injury to her 17 year old friend in a takeaway’s storeroom, the business’s owner was found guilty of breaching health and safety regulations by failing to maintain a gas appliance on his premises. The owner was given a suspended six-month prison sentence, 200 hours unpaid work and ordered to pay £15,000.

From destroying a thriving business to killing and disabling innocent people, these alarming incidents confirm that bad gas work and faulty or poor performing appliances can devastate businesses and lives.

Your responsibilities

Section 35, Part F of the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 states:

“It shall be the duty of every employer or self-employed person to ensure that any gas appliance, installation pipework or flue installed at any place of work under his control is maintained in a safe condition so as to prevent risk of injury to any person.”
The regulations do not actually say how appliances, flues and pipework should be maintained or how frequently, however, some Health and Safety Executive (HSE) documents do provide some clarification for the United Kingdom.

HSE Catering Information Sheet No 11 “The Main Health and Safety Law applicable to Catering” states:

“No set inspection of gas systems is specified but it is good practice to have such systems inspected for safety annually.”

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais11.pdf

HSE Catering Information Sheet No 12 “Maintenance Priorities in Catering” states:

“Appliances need to be routinely serviced to ensure their continued safe operation. This must be done by competent personnel such as appropriately qualified service engineers.”


HSE Catering Information Sheet No 23 (rev. 1) “Gas Safety in Catering and Hospitality” states:

“Periods between inspections may vary dependent on the equipment and its use and should follow manufacturer’s recommendations, but as a general rule annual inspections will be a reasonable minimum frequency.”

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais23.pdf

To summarise, gas equipment should be inspected for safety at least once every twelve months and should be serviced by competent personnel in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. Many factors can influence the need for more frequent service but as a general guide, if gas fired equipment is used for more than six hours per day it may need more frequent servicing. Hospitality and catering staff that use gas equipment should also be trained to conduct common-sense daily visual inspections for obvious faults. A qualified catering equipment engineer can assess all the factors and provide guidance as to the required service.

How to find qualified engineers

The CEDA/CESA ‘Register of Qualified Catering Equipment Engineers’ is the only register of its type in the industry and should be the first point of call for hospitality operators. All engineers have to hold appropriate qualifications to be included on the register which can be found at: www.qengineers.co.uk.

By entering the first two letters of a postcode, register users can quickly and easily locate qualified registered engineers in the area.

CEDA and CESA have also worked collaboratively on a second initiative, the Gas Safety Inspection Worksheet. The worksheet is available to CEDA or CESA members only and carries the Gas Safe Register logo (under licence to the HSE). There is a strict vetting procedure and audit trail for users of the worksheet to ensure that the member company is registered with the Gas Safe Register and its engineers are suitably qualified. The worksheet covers all the checks that an engineer should carry out when performing a gas safety inspection and makes provision for reports on up to eight appliances as well as providing space for recording work required to bring equipment to a safe condition. If all appliances are safe, a certificate featuring the Gas Safe Register logo can be issued to the hospitality operator, serving as proof of work done in compliance with the Gas Regulations and the HSE Catering Information Sheet No 11 “The Main Health and Safety Law applicable to Catering”.

Complying with the regulations

CEDA and CESA have worked together on schemes to recognise the competency of engineers in the hospitality business. It is often assumed that if an engineer is Gas Safe registered, they are qualified to carry out all gas work, but this is not the case! For engineers to work legally on commercial catering equipment, they must have special COMCAT (Commercial Catering Appliance) accreditations. All Gas Safe registered engineers carry identity cards that indicate their qualifications and expiry dates. Furthermore, all engineers registered for gas catering equipment on the Register of Qualified Engineers have their accreditations checked and the expiry date of their card indicates the date that their earliest accreditation is due for renewal.

If the business contains other gas appliances such as central heating or pipework, these too must be checked by a suitably qualified and Gas Safe registered engineer.

Whilst it may be tempting to use an engineer who charges less than others, make certain a suitably qualified engineer is used. The consequences of using an unqualified engineer can be costly both in terms of money wasted and in risk to the health and safety of staff, guests and the business. Remember the duty of care!
Gas safety checklist

Make sure gas appliances and connected services are safe and efficient by:

- Buying new gas powered equipment from reputable sources like a CEDA member who will not only offer a competitive price but will also ensure that the appliance is installed and commissioned correctly. Go to: www.ceda.co.uk to find a member in your area. Online prices are often cheaper, but be aware that the gas appliances may be inferior and potentially dangerous. Also, you may not get the required advice to guarantee that the installation is in accordance with the regulations.

- Have gas equipment installed by an engineer listed on the CEDA/CESA Register of Qualified Catering Equipment Engineers. See: www.qengineers.co.uk

- Clean gas powered ranges and other equipment regularly following the manufacturer’s recommendations.

- Have the equipment inspected at least once every 12 months - more often if needed - to check it is operating efficiently and safely.

- Follow the manufacturer’s recommended maintenance schedule, and use only competent and qualified engineers to carry out the work.

- There are some things that relate to gas safety that every caterer can check easily. Firstly, yellow flames indicate poor combustion which could be creating CO. Secondly, regularly check grease filters in extraction canopies. If they are dirty they will be inefficient and this could result in a build-up of CO. If there is any doubt about the operational performance or safety of gas-powered equipment do not use it and get it checked immediately.

- The HSE strongly recommends the use of CO alarms or detectors as a precaution to give advance warning of CO in a property, however, CO alarms do NOT replace regular maintenance and safety checks by a Gas Safe registered engineer.

Commercial pressure and a tough business environment naturally encourage hospitality operators to curb costs, but gas safety is not the place to save a few pounds. Short-term savings can cost dearly in fines and can potentially kill people.

Further resources

Catering Equipment Distributors Association (CEDA) - a trade association representing more than 80 professional catering equipment distributors in the UK. www.ceda.co.uk

Catering Equipment Suppliers Association (CESA) - a membership association representing over 160 commercial catering equipment companies. www.cesa.org.uk


Gas Safe Charity - working to improve gas safety by putting an end to deaths and illness caused by dangerous or faulty gas works and appliances. www.gassafecharity.org.uk

Gas Safe Register - the official gas registration body for the UK, Isle of Man and Guernsey. By law all gas engineers must be on the Gas Safe Register. www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Health & Safety Executive (HSE) - provides catering and hospitality-specific health and safety information, templates, documents, CO FAQs and publications to support hospitality businesses. www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/co.htm

