

News Release



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AIR CONDITIONING SYSTEMS ARE 'IN BREACH OF THE LAW'

The Government is in serious danger of killing off the air conditioning inspection regime, according to Bob Towse, head of technical and safety at the Building & Engineering Services Association (B&ES).

9 October 2013 – Under UK energy efficiency regulations, all air conditioning systems in buildings with a cooling capacity of over 12kW should have been inspected – but fewer than 5% actually have been, according to Mr Towse. This means that the vast majority of such systems have been in breach of the law for at least two years.

"Apart from the potential legal penalties, building owners and managers are missing out on the energy efficiency benefits that are flagged up by the inspections," said Mr Towse.

All air conditioning systems put in place on or after 1 January 2008 should have been inspected within five years of installation, with older systems over 250kW output inspected by January 2009, and other systems above 12kW inspected by January 2011.

“Very few building owners are even aware of their legal responsibility, while local authorities – who are charged with enforcing this law – are not doing a great job of it,” Mr Towse pointed out.

Many industry observers fear that the inspections will go the same way as other measures, such as the Code for Sustainable Homes, as the Coalition Government looks to cut what it regards as “business red tape”.

Mandatory air conditioning inspections were brought in under the implementation of the European Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), with “compulsory lodgement” of the reports through the Government’s non-domestic energy performance certificate register being introduced two years ago.

However, the Government has since doubled the cost of lodgement, and there have been problems with the software imposed on certification bodies by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

“It is complex, time-consuming and not at all user-friendly,” said Mr Towse. “The assessors are contractors trying to make a living in a tough economic environment, so they will not be encouraged by being forced to use ‘glitchy’ software and to pay more for the privilege.”

B&ES has also pointed to other anomalies in the system, including the fact that fines for non-compliance can be less than the amount paid for an inspection – the maximum penalty is just £300. Insurance companies are also reported to be offering policies to cover building owners and operators who might be caught out by the scheme.

In conclusion, Mr Towse said, "Under compulsory lodgement, it should be easier to trace buildings that are failing to comply with their legal obligations, but there is little evidence that this is being done – and local authorities do not appear to have the expertise, resources and/or inclination properly to take on the challenge. However, if the regime is allowed to die, so will a central pillar of the country's strategy to reduce energy waste in buildings – and to help businesses cut their running costs."

Ends

Issued on behalf of B&ES (the Building & Engineering Services Association) by Next Step Marketing Ltd

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Note to Editors

Since its formation in 1904, B&ES, the Building & Engineering Services Association (formerly the HVCA) has represented the interests of companies engaged in a wide range of building and engineering services disciplines.

B&ES helps its members to build successful businesses by being the leading trade association for integrated building and engineering services and renewable technologies. It is a unifying force that promotes and monitors excellence; provides quality advice, guidance, training and support; generates market-leading thinking; and shapes the commercial environment through active representation.

B&ES members are subject to regular, third-party inspection and assessment of their technical competence and commercial capability, carried out by an independent certification body at least every three years.

Picture captions:

(left) *'Bob Towse, B&ES head of technical and safety'.*

(right) *'All air conditioning systems put in place on or after 1 January 2008 should have been inspected within five years of installation'.*