



INSURERS GET TOUGH ON DUCTWORK FIRE HAZARDS

The HVCA warns that poorly maintained kitchen extraction ductwork is a huge fire risk with mounting evidence that insurance companies are refusing to pay up if a fire is traced back to grease laden or incorrectly fitted ductwork.

22 June 2011 – A fire that recently broke out in the kitchen of a popular pub-restaurant on the outskirts of Woking in Surrey caused substantial damage to the building. Grease in the kitchen ductwork was the cause compounded by a poorly fitted ductwork system. The pub's owners were devastated to discover that their insurers are refusing to pay out.

Ventilation ductwork is a key area of potential fire risk and too many systems have failed to meet fire safety guidelines in the past – often due to irregular or completely absent maintenance. In many cases where a fire has been traced back to the kitchen extract system it has never been cleaned since the ductwork was installed. As with the Woking public house, in such circumstances insurance companies are rejecting fire damage claims and refusing to pay out because having the extraction system cleaned is nearly always a condition of their policies.

Bob Towse, Head of Technical and Safety at the Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association (HVCA), comments, "Changes to fire regulations introduced in 2005 placed a heavy responsibility on owners, landlords and managing agents to ensure risk

assessments have been carried out in their buildings, including identification of potential ignition sources; failure to do so can lead to hefty fines and possible prison sentences. “In many cases systems are only serviced, maintained and cleaned when they finally break down. This is quite simply unacceptable. “HVCA member firms are regularly called to testify as expert witnesses in cases where fires have broken out in kitchens and then spread along grease-laden ductwork to other parts of the building. “Insurance firms are using poor maintenance of ventilation extract systems as grounds for refusing to pay out because they can assert that warranties have been breached due to lack of proper cleaning regimes.

“Adhering to the HVCA’s ‘Guide to Good Practice – Internal Cleanliness of Ventilation Systems’, which is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive, and carrying out regular inspections and recommissioning is a good way to satisfy insurance companies that the right steps have been taken to properly clean kitchen extraction and ventilation systems, both to minimise fire risk and safeguard the health of employees.

We would recommend that systems are cleaned and recommissioned at least every 12 months; however some systems may need to be cleaned even more frequently than this due to the cooking type and usage. System owners are recommended to introduce a “condition survey” process to establish the frequency required for their system.”

Copies of the HVCA’s ‘Guide to Good Practice – Internal Cleanliness of Ventilation Systems’ (TR19) is available from the HVCA Publications Unit in Penrith on 01768 860405 or via the HVCA website at: www.hvca.org.uk.

Ends

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Media enquiries to: Denzil Lee. Tel: +44(0)1256 472020;
Fax: +44(0)1256 471010; E-mail: info@nextstepmarketing.co.uk

Notes to Editors

The HVCA represents the interests of firms active in the design, installation and maintenance of heating, ventilating, air conditioning and refrigeration systems. Its membership comprises over 1,500 companies with 2,000 offices throughout the UK, a combined turnover of £4bn and a workforce of 55,000. HVCA members are subject to regular, third-party inspection and assessment of their technical competence and commercial capability.