

NATIONAL GRID GAS SENTENCED OVER MISSING GAS NETWORK RECORDS

National gas utility company National Grid Gas plc has been fined for failing to ensure its records relating to gas risers in some high-rise multi occupancy building were up to date.

Liverpool Crown Court previous heard that in June 2017 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) requested information from gas distribution network (GDN) companies about their management of gas networks in high rise multiple occupancy buildings (HRMOBs).

At the time of the offence National Grid Gas operated the nationwide gas transmission system and the gas distribution systems supplying gas to approximately half of the UK domestic and industrial gas customers, including the gas pipes in HRMOBs.

However, in 2016 National Grid Gas sold part of its operations to Cadent Gas Ltd, this included the activities which the failings relate to. HSE's investigation revealed the incomplete records were transferred to Cadent by National Grid Gas when they sold their gas networks to Cadent. The system had not been subject to any audits or reviews when the records issue came to light in December 2017. As such Cadent were continuing to inspect only the buildings on the existing database.

After HSE had requested the information, it found that Cadent's management records were incomplete and found that records on 769 buildings were missing, meaning gas risers in these HRMOBs had not been subject to a condition survey, inspection or routine maintenance for a number of years.

Additionally, the investigation found that National Grid Gas had failed to ensure that 112 HRMOBs had Pipeline Isolation Valves (PIVs) so that gas to these buildings could be isolated in the event of an incident.

As a result of this, HSE undertook a criminal investigation that considered the risk that residents and members of the public were exposed to as a result of breaches to Health and Safety legislation. Enforcement notices were issued in April 2018 requiring Cadent to take remedial action. Cadent took appropriate action and complied with the notices by September 2018.

National Grid Gas plc of 1-3 Strand, London, WC2N 5EH pleaded guilty to breaching Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 on 06 November 2020. Today they were fined £4 million with £91,805 costs at Liverpool Crown Court.

After the hearing, HM principal inspector for HSE, Julie Voce said: "This case had wide ranging implications. Our investigations found that people living and working in the high-rise buildings where the failings took place were not protected from the risk of gas leaks.

“National Grid Gas did not have a robust system for recording the details of the gas pipes within these buildings. Opportunities arose where National Grid Gas identified data errors, but these were never satisfactorily acted upon, and opportunities to correct the situation were missed.

“This sentence reflects how important it is when companies are charged with ensuring records that could keep people safe and well are up to date, that they make that task a priority.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. www.hse.gov.uk

2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/

3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

4. In 2018 Ofgem commenced its own investigation into breaches of licence conditions. The findings of the Ofgem investigation were published in May 2019 and Cadent paid a financial penalty to Ofgem of £24 million and agreed to set up a community fund of £20 million to support customers in vulnerable circumstances.

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