

Important to think about gas safety

It's Gas Safety Week (18 to 24 September) and everyone is reminded to be 'gas safe'. Badly-fitted and poorly-serviced gas appliances can kill. Make sure all gas appliances are serviced by a Gas Safe Register engineer.

Check gas appliances

Incorrectly installed or maintained heating and cooking appliances can result in the leakage of carbon monoxide – an invisible, odourless poison, which can cause ill health or even death.

Every year, people suffer from preventable gas-related accidents, such as:

- gas leaks
- explosions
- fires
- carbon monoxide poisoning

The signs of carbon monoxide poisoning include: headaches, dizziness, breathlessness, nausea, collapse and loss of consciousness.

Checking appliances regularly for damage and having your boiler professionally-serviced regularly by a Gas Safe Register engineer could significantly reduce the risk of leaks by detecting problems early.

You can get more information at the link below:

If someone other than an engineer on the Gas Safe Register carries out gas work at your home, you could be risking the safety of your family and your property.

Tips for staying 'gas safe'

To ensure you stay 'gas safe' :

- only use a Gas Safe registered engineer to fit, fix or service gas appliances
- have your gas appliances safety checked every year (if you rent your home, make sure your landlord arranges this)
- ask to see your engineer's Gas Safe Register ID card and check both sides to make sure they are qualified for the work you need doing
- check for warning signs – lazy yellow or orange flames instead of crisp blue ones, black marks or stains on or around the appliance, and too much condensation in the room could be signs your gas appliance is not working correctly
- fit a carbon monoxide alarm – choose an audible alarm which will alert you if there is carbon monoxide (CO) in your home

Gas leak

If you smell gas and think you have a gas leak in your home make sure you:

- call the 24-hour gas emergency number on 0800 002 001, or if there's a risk to life call 999
- shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve
- open all doors and windows for ventilation
- put out all naked flames
- check gas appliances to see if the gas has been left on unlit or that a pilot is out
- go outside into fresh air

Do not:

- turn any electrical switches, including door entry systems, on or off
- use matches, light naked flames, or smoke
- leave it to someone else to call the emergency services

For all reports of 'smell of gas in cellar':

- do not enter the cellar
- evacuate the entire premises

To turn off your gas supply, you first need to locate the gas isolation valve. In more modern houses, the gas meter and isolation valve are often located outside in a meter box.

More useful links

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[Rates discount deadline for landlords](#)

If you're a landlord, you may be eligible for a discount on your rate bills, but time is running out. Bills should be paid in full by Friday 28 September in order to receive an allowance deduction on your bill.

Allowance

If you have an Article 20 or Article 21 rate account and are responsible for the rates on one or more rental properties which are occupied by tenants, you may be entitled to an allowance of 10 per cent. This is paid by way of a discount on your rate bill.

This discount does not include your residential address, second homes, or personal holiday homes.

If you have a property where the tenant is currently liable for the rates, [you can sign up to a formal agreement](#) for them to pay the rates on the property.

For more information, see the page below:

How to pay

You should allow a minimum of five working days for any payment to reach Land & Property Services (LPS) – this includes if you pay at a Post Office.

You can [pay your rates online](#) or by phone on 0300 200 7801 (choose option one).

Difficulty paying and arrears

Landlords having difficulty paying their rate bill should contact LPS as soon as possible on:

It may be possible to discuss alternative payment arrangements to avoid LPS taking legal debt recovery action.

LPS is actively pursuing landlord accounts with rate arrears. LPS is willing to help any landlord in arrears by agreeing mutually acceptable payment arrangements that could allow a discount to be awarded for current year rates.

More useful links

[High winds warning – power and travel advice](#)

With high winds forecast for some areas, disruption to traffic or travel could be a consequence. Power cuts are also a possibility. There are things you can do to prepare in case your electricity goes off. There are practical steps you can take if it does.

Traffic and travel

High-sided vehicles are most affected by windy weather, but strong gusts can also blow a car, cyclist, motorcyclist or horse rider off course. This can happen on open stretches of road exposed to strong cross winds, or when

passing bridges or gaps in the hedges.

In very windy weather a vehicle may be affected by turbulence created by large vehicles. Motorcyclists are particularly affected, so keep well back from them when they are overtaking a high-sided vehicle.

Motorists are also advised to drive with care due to possible wind-blown debris.

If there are any problems on the roads as a result of high winds, you can get the latest updates on the [TrafficwatchNI website](#).

If you're planning to travel by air or sea, you should check with the ferry company or airline in case there are any delays or cancellations.

Preparing for a power cut

It's important to be prepared for a potential loss of power. You should:

- know where your household fuses and trip switches are so that you can check if the problem is with your electrics only
- test smoke alarms regularly and
- keep a supply of new batteries in torches and radios (for checking updates on news bulletins)
- keep a supply of candles
- if you have a baby at home, make sure you have a supply of pre-prepared formula baby milk (if used) and prepare a flask of hot water to heat bottles and baby food (it is always safer to make up a fresh feed; when this is not possible, feeds should never be stored for longer than 24 hours)

If you depend on electrical equipment that is vital to your health, contact Northern Ireland Electricity Network (NIE) to get on their Critical Care Register:

If your electricity goes off

If your electricity goes off, you should:

- check your fuses and trip switches – then check if your neighbours are without power
- leave one light on
- leave your fridge/ freezer switched on with the door shut to maintain a low temperature
- check that other electrical appliances and machinery are switched off at the wall
- preferably use a torch, oil or gas lamp as a source of light rather than candles
- if you must use naked flames, please take extra care and make certain that they are put out before you go to bed
- check on elderly or vulnerable neighbours in your area to make sure they are okay

- if you are using a generator, be careful where you site it in case of carbon monoxide poisoning

Reporting a power cut

If your power is off and you want to report it or get more information, contact NIE's Customer Helpline or visit their website:

More useful links

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[Check in with someone if worried about their mental well-being](#)

Check in with someone if you're worried about their mental well-being and ask them how they're feeling. Mental health problems can affect anyone at any time of life and in different ways. Anyone who is in distress or despair can contact the Lifeline helpline on 0808 808 8000.

Start a caring conversation

Start a caring conversation with someone you're concerned about and let the person know about that concern.

Give them the space to explain what's going on with them and how they're feeling.

Offering a gentle word of support and listening in a non-judgemental way can make all the difference. Encourage them to tell their story in their own way and at their own pace, and let them know that you will support them to find the help that they need.

By asking the person the questions, 'are you feeling a bit low?' or 'are you worried about something?' you're acknowledging their distress and giving them the chance to talk about something that is probably very frightening for them.

It's even ok to ask someone if they have had thoughts about harming themselves or about suicide.

Talking about how they're feeling could be the first step towards recovery.

You can find information on what you can say and do to help someone on [this](#)

[Public Health Agency leaflet.](#)

Training courses

There are a number of training courses available in mental and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention.

You can find out more at this link:

Recognising potential warning signs

There are some early warning signs that may indicate mental ill-health or a mental health problem, including:

- mood swings or a consistently lower mood
- lack of care for personal appearance or personal responsibilities
- increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- talking about not wanting to live
- a loss of interest in doing things they previously enjoyed
- withdrawing from social activities or spending less time with family and friends
- disturbed sleep, perhaps not getting enough sleep or sleeping too much
- eating less than normal or overeating, perhaps losing or gaining weight
- being more irritable, over-sensitive or aggressive
- having difficulty following a conversation, remembering things or concentrating
- experiencing recurrent physical symptoms such as aches and pains or unexplained illnesses
- a drop in work performance
- doing things that don't make sense to others
- hearing or seeing things that no-one else can hear or see

Someone who's having suicidal thoughts may not ask for help, but that doesn't mean they don't want help and support. It can be difficult finding the words to express what they're feeling.

You can find out more about what to do if you think someone might be in need of immediate help on the [Mental health emergency – if you're in crisis or despair](#) page.

You can find out more about mental health at the pages below:

Lifeline

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, contact Lifeline on:

This is a confidential service, where trained counsellors will listen and help immediately on the phone and follow up with other support if necessary. The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

[Locations to visit over European heritage weekend](#)

European Heritage Open Days (EHOD) (Saturday 9 September to Sunday 10 September) offers the opportunity to visit historic buildings and places of interest, free of charge – some of which aren't usually open to the public. With events kicking off tomorrow, below are some final ideas of where to visit over the weekend.

Kilwaughter Castle, Co Antrim

Visit the ruins of a 400-year-old castle, later remodelled by architect John Nash, with an original tower house.

There'll be a talk and guided walk from the castle towards the large artificial lake created for the Agnew family who lived here and were the tax collectors for Co Antrim.

Poyntzpass, Co Armagh

The village of Poyntzpass, Co Armagh is steeped in history and there is lots to do in the village on Saturday 9 September.

There will be a guided walk taking in some of the village's interesting sites – the 100-year-old stone 'Face in the Wall', the Newry Canal, and the Red Hand Inn, scene of a gruesome murder in days of yore.

Visit Poyntzpass railway station – the Victorian signal-man's cabin is the only one of its kind on its original site in Northern Ireland with all of its equipment intact.

There'll be an exhibition at the Credit Union, and refreshments are available at the former village courthouse where a variety of petty misdemeanours were dealt with in this building for over 100 years.

Belfast City Hall – adults' cryptic challenge and children's puzzle challenge

Are you and your family partial to puzzles? Kids crazy for conundrums? Test your brain power and explore the grounds of Belfast City Hall for a cryptic challenge. Discover the secret symbols and hidden heritage to be entered into a prize draw.

There's also a special children's challenge – they can explore the City Hall grounds and gardens and to discover Belfast's past to be entered into a prize draw.

Mountains of Mourne Country Cottages – Hanna's Close, Co Down

These eight cottages, dating back to the 1600s, are now restored and maintained. Most of them have granite open fireplaces and granite floors.

There will be talk on the history of the 'Clachan', an Irish settlement, and insight into the daily lives of the people and how they lived.

Waterways Ireland Archives open day, Co Fermanagh

Waterways Ireland headquarters will be open for guided tours of its archive and building in Enniskillen.

Housing a collection of original engineering drawings, maps, and toll books from the 1800s, the archive offers a unique insight into Ireland's industrial past.

More information on the [Waterways Ireland website](#).

Creggan Country Park, Co Londonderry

This self-led nature trail is perfect for families looking to explore nature on their doorstep. Work together to find 10 hidden tiles along the trail showing mammals, birds, and invertebrates on the site. Solve the clues and write down your answers to claim a prize at the activity centre.

Knockmany Passage Tomb, Co Tyrone

Discover the remains of a passage tomb situated on the summit of Knockmany in the forest park with archaeologist Edith Logue.

The cairn and the passage are no longer present, but the stones of the chamber are visible and are decorated with characteristic passage tomb art, including spirals, zigzags, and circles.

European Heritage Open Days

If you want to find out more about what and when properties are opening, what events are on, and if you need to book, you can get information and download the brochure at the following link:

Keep up-to-date with European Heritage Open Days on [Facebook](#) and on [Twitter \(@ehodni\)](#).

The weekend promises to have something for everyone so why not come along and

enjoy a little bit of history right on your doorstep?

More useful links

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