

SAFE HANDLING OF REFRIGERANTS TRAINING

Service Engineer takes up an invitation from Business Edge to get first hand experience of what was required to handle refrigerants safely.

With the use of virgin HCFCs for top up due to be banned from January 1, 2010, the need for concise up to date information and training regarding the safe handling of refrigerants couldn't be more important.

Air conditioning and refrigeration technicians and engineers, full term apprentices and all plant engineers or personnel concerned with the recovery, charging or disposal of refrigerants must be 100 per cent certain about critical legal and environmental implications regarding refrigerant safe handling.

But while many companies are sending their employees on such courses, it would appear others are still holding back, believing that with the deadline still three years away, there is plenty of time.

However, according to Business Edge, the air conditioning training, environmental control consultancy, which runs Safe Handling of Refrigerants courses across the country, time is of the essence.

Speaking at a recent course attended by employees from the likes of MITIE, Amp-Air, Olympic and Air Space, Kelvin Kelly warned that demand will soon outstrip supply if current trends continue.

"Last year we must have had 300 to 400 people doing the safe handling course, which was about 30 people a month," said Business Edge's business development and training manager.

"However we are set for record levels this year with courses already looking like they will have to be run nearly every day for three months solid.

"As a training provider that is not good as it can be dangerous. It means that we are all working non-stop on the same subject, which means that the lecturers are running on auto-pilot, are not at their peak and therefore do not offer the level of service one would expect.

"It would help us if more companies sent their employees on courses in the depths of winter when they are not so busy and that way we can spread the training out across the year."

Service Engineer attended a Refrigerant Safe Handling course held at Panasonic last month to see exactly what was required to become fully competent.

Nine delegates spent two days carrying out the practical assessments and written tests. Day one covered all refrigerant types, environmental implications, the nature of ozone, UV radiation, safety implications, leak detection, European EPA regulations, legal liabilities and responsibilities, theory and methods of safe handling.

The remainder of day one and all of day two was "hands on" and included a practical demonstration as well as a training and assessment session on the methods of refrigerant safe handling.

It also featured the written exam set by CITB-ConstructionSkills. Satisfactory completion of the course and a pass grade leads to entry to the CITB-ConstructionSkills Register and also allows the opportunity to apply for voluntary registration with the ACRIB.

The topics included: the nature of the ozone layer and why we need it; how refrigerants affect the ozone layer and induce global warming; new alternative refrigerants, zeotropes, properties, characteristics, controls on production and phase-out dates; the Environmental Protection Act; and safe refrigerant recovery.

At the end of the course delegates are able to:

- Practically demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the lecturer, competence in the “Safe Handling” of refrigerants with minimum release to atmosphere.
- Identify “Good Refrigeration Practices”, “Good Design” and “Good Housekeeping Techniques” to control the release of refrigerants to the absolute minimum.
- Describe the “Environmental Impacts” of all refrigerants
- Describe the requirements of the Montreal Protocol and EC Regulations concerning refrigerants.
- Describe the HVAC, refrigeration industries and refrigerant manufacturer responses.