

Our Ref: E-25367

23 October 2018

Coroner Jacqui Hawkins
Coroner's Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Coroner Hawkins

INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF SONIA SOFIANOPOULOS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your finding into the death of Mrs Sonia Sofianopoulos. On behalf of Energy Safe Victoria (ESV), I thank you for your work on this important public health and safety issue. I also offer condolences to the friends and family of Mrs Sofianopoulos. You have addressed the following recommendations to me:

Recommendation One

I recommend that Chris Wealthy, the Chief Executive Officer of Australian Gas Association and Paul Fearon, the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Safe Victoria, collaborate to implement a strategy and a plan to phase out all OFG heaters.

I confirm support in principle for this recommendation.

ESV is supporting the Victorian Government's review of open flue gas space heaters, with options – including a phase-out – to be assessed through a regulatory impact statement process under the *Gas Safety Act 1997*. This review will continue into 2019 and be informed by public and industry consultation.

ESV has also started working with manufacturers and suppliers of open flue gas heaters (OFG heaters) to consider methods and timeframes to transition away from open flue gas space heaters.

Recommendation Four

I recommend that Paul Fearon, the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Safe Victoria, publish an article in their quarterly newsletter about the importance of testing for carbon monoxide spillage and provide guidance as to the appropriate detection equipment to use to obtain the most accurate results and to ensure the safety of the users.

I confirm support for this recommendation.

Energy Safe Victoria's quarterly newsletter (EnergySafe magazine), was published in October 2018 and included articles addressing negative pressure (p4), new gas scheme rules (p10), carbon monoxide risks and non-compliances (p19), and new Type A gas appliance information sheets (p19). Subsequent editions will reiterate this information.

Previously, ESV has published an article in EnergySafe magazine (Autumn 2015 p19) and covering CO detectors in some depth. A further article was published in Winter 2017 (p19) included a brief paragraph covering aspects of the issue as well.

There are a number of different types of equipment to test for carbon monoxide spillage available to practitioners. ESV will work closely with industry and the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) to investigate the appropriateness of different types of detectors, and provide advice to plumbers, gasfitters and consumers.

Recommendation Seven

I recommend that Paul Fearon, the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Safe Victoria, conduct a review on the best way for Energy Safe Victoria to communicate guidelines, changes to legislation and industry updates to relevant industry stakeholders using all forms of modern technology including phone applications, social media, and YouTube videos.

I confirm support for this recommendation.

Updates to guidelines, standards and other requirements can be frequent, and it is essential that critical changes are communicated in a way that is accessible and appropriate to meet industry needs.

ESV is reviewing the way in which it communicates these important updates, and will be consulting with industry and practitioners on approaches to best meet their needs. This review will be completed in 2018, with appropriate new communication tools and methods expected to be in use by early 2019.

Recommendation Eight

I recommend that Paul Fearon, the Chief Executive Officer of Energy Safe Victoria, conduct a widespread media and public awareness campaign on the dangers associated with OFG heaters, especially in the context of negative pressure and lack of adventitious ventilation and the need and importance of servicing and maintaining OFG heaters.

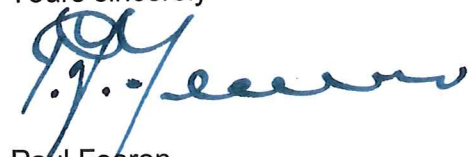
I confirm support for this recommendation.

Information and education for consumers is essential to support consumers in readily identifying risks. ESV will develop a refreshed, broad-based community campaign in consultation with key stakeholders to deliver a strong call to action on gas heater safety, and provide specific guidance on risks associated with open flue gas space heaters, in the lead up to Winter 2019.

ESV currently provides community information through its website. This highlights critical risk messages and promotes community action on precautionary measures, such as maintenance checks of heaters and installation of carbon monoxide alarms. This will also provide clear advice to consumers and practitioners on open flue gas heaters that are subject to remedial action.

ESV is committed to working closely with agencies across the Victorian Government, with technical regulators in other jurisdictions and with industry in taking comprehensive action on the risks to public safety posed by open flue gas space heaters. If you require further information, please contact Steve Cronin, General Manager Gas and Pipeline Safety and Technical Regulation, on 9271 5448 or at steve.cronin@energysafe.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Paul Fearon
DIRECTOR OF ENERGY SAFETY