

Summary of the All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) meeting: Ofgem funding for Carbon Monoxide Safety Projects

9 February 2021, 14:30–15:30

Attendees:

Name	Position	Organisation
Barry Sheerman MP	Chair	House of Commons (Labour (Co-op))
Baroness Finlay	Co-Chair of the APPCOG	House of Lords (Crossbench)
Liz Twist MP	Officer of the APPCOG	House of Commons (Labour)
Nigel Winnan	Customer & Social Obligations Manager	Wales & West Utilities
Phil Burrows	Customer Vulnerability Social Programmes Delivery Manager	Cadent
Kerry Potter	Group Social Impact and Vulnerability Manager	SGN
Dan Edwards	Stakeholder Project Manager	SGN
Jill Walker	Social Strategy Project Manager	Northern Gas Network (NGN)
Steve Dacre	Vulnerability Innovations Lead	Northern Gas Network (NGN)
Ian McCluskey	Head of Technical Services and Policy	Institute of Gas Engineers and Managers (IGEM)
Robert Lyon	Chair of the APPCOG Comms Group	Council of Gas Detection and Environmental Monitoring (CoGDDEM)

Chris Bielby	Chairman	Gas Industry Safety Group (GISG) & Gas Safety Trust (GST)
Jonathan Shaw	CEO	Policy Connect
Oona Muirhead, CBE	Business Advisor	Policy Connect
Robert McLaren	Head of Health and Accessibility	Policy Connect
Laura Fatah	Policy Manager, Carbon Monoxide	Policy Connect

Summary:

Ofgem's new fund

1. Ofgem is the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets: its mission as a regulator is “to protect consumers now and in the future by working to deliver a greener, fairer energy system”. Ofgem is introducing a new ‘use it or lose it’ fund to incentivise and enable Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) to undertake projects to promote CO safety and help vulnerable consumers. The new CO and vulnerability fund (the VCMA) replaces the ‘Gas Discretionary Reward Scheme’ but is both more generous (£60mil over 5 years), and is aimed at promoting ambitious collaborative projects (25% of the new fund is ring fenced for cross-GDN initiatives). The fund comes into effect in the new five year regulatory period starting in April 2021.
2. In his opening remarks, Barry Sheerman MP praised the group’s success in maintaining the regulators focus on CO Safety, and expressed his delight at the increased funding which has been made available. Working in partnership has always been a strength of the APPCOG, resulting in a very dedicated and supportive group of stakeholders from industry, academia and science which continues to grow.
3. Nigel Winnan delivered an insightful presentation explaining the function of the fund. The points from this presentation are incorporated into this event summary at 4 - 11; you can also view the slides attached.

Collaboration between GDNs

4. The new fund will be split between individual GDN projects (75%) and collaborative project work (25%), to encourage shared learning and increase project benefit. There is also a requirement for GDNs to hold an annual conference to showcase the outcomes they have achieved and to enable shared learning.

Project Eligibility

5. The GDNs are responsible for identifying and developing suitable projects, and deciding on funding based on a business case that tests the project against OfGEM’s set criteria. Ofgem will look for evidence that money has been spent well at a later point.
6. To be eligible, projects must bring a direct benefit to consumers; either by:
 - I. benefiting consumers in vulnerable situations,

- II. providing awareness from the dangers of CO,
- III. reducing the risk of health issues caused by CO.

As CO poisoning can affect anyone, CO messages can benefit all gas users.

- 7. Each projects' estimated social return on investment (SRoI) will be stated within the Project Eligibility Assessment; this may include identifying outputs, deliverables and estimated consumer reach. Some participants suggested that it may be straight forward to demonstrate SRoI for awareness campaigns rather than for projects which include a significant research component. This is because the benefits of research are often realised over the longer term. However, participants also reflected on past research which has produced clear benefits to customers, including the APPCOG's own CO Alarms report which informed the government's proposal for new measures to protect tenants. The group also noted that research may be one component of a project, which may also include awareness raising and direct assistance. In addition, research work will readily satisfy the requirement of projects which go above 'business as usual', which is a core tenant of the new fund.

Vulnerable Consumers

- 8. A strong focus of the new fund is bringing benefit to vulnerable consumers, such as those at risk of fuel poverty, older customers, young families and pregnant women. Many sources of vulnerability are also assessed with greater risk from CO. So some projects may address both the vulnerability and the CO aspects of the fund criteria.
- 9. GDNs are currently considering vulnerable customer initiatives such as improving energy efficiency, measures to tackle fuel poverty, increased awareness and usability of the Priority Services Register, and distributing free CO alarms. There is also a GDN project proposal focussed on pregnancy, which is currently being finalised.
- 10. Attendees noted the inherent difficulties in identifying and engaging with the most vulnerable consumers, engaging with relevant stakeholder groups can be useful in overcoming such challenges, for example reaching individuals who may be socially isolated. Baroness Findlay made the point that Covid and other factors have changed the practical definition of vulnerability.

Steering Group

- 11. GDNs have established a steering group to co-ordinate the projects. The steering group is engaging stakeholders including Energy UK, National Energy Action and the Gas Safety Trust. There is a possibility for project work to be co-funded with other stakeholder funding streams, (however projects cannot be co-funded from public money sources). APPCOG Co-Chairs Baroness Finlay and Barry Sheerman MP, and APPCOG officer Liz Twist MP all expressed a desire to support and assist project work, offering to publicise campaigns via their own channels, provide quotes, and highlight the need for work on CO to continue. Liz Twist MP suggested the development of networks of MPs all willing to get messages out.

Media Engagement

- 12. Parliamentarians expressed interest and enthusiasm for supporting media engagement. APPCOG Comms group Co-Chair Rob Lyon shared some of his experience working on successful media campaigns; where in order to gain the most coverage, a story should already include all the core elements, requiring no further work or research to be newsworthy. Key elements to include are a spokesperson, recent statistics or research, and case studies to highlight both good and bad practice.

APPCOG Work Streams 2021

13. The meeting concluded with a short presentation from Laura Fatah, exploring upcoming policy opportunities and potential stakeholder engagement for the APPCOG to consider, in light of the new regulatory focus [please find the slides attached]. These work streams include:
- a) **CO alarms regulation.** We expect the MHCLG decision on the extension of CO Alarms regulations in rented property to provide an excellent opportunity for focussing public and parliamentary attention on the importance of CO safety. This will be a key time for the APPCOG, both to raise awareness and to ensure that the new regulations are as effective as possible. The National Landlords Association, whom sat on the round tables in previous alarm work, will be key stakeholders for collaboration here.
 - b) **Awareness raising 18 – 25.** The APPCOG is well placed to support awareness raising in the 18 – 25 age range, and can make use of Policy Connect's relationships with FE and HE stakeholders.
 - c) **National referral system for CO survivors.** At present, there is no national referral system for survivors of CO exposure, and accessing appropriate treatment can be a challenge. The recently opened pilot neurology clinic at St George's Hospital can provide specialist treatment for those exposed to CO within the last two years, if participants could be identified via a referral system these treatments could be offered to appropriate individuals. The APPCOG's COMed group is well placed to consider how such a system might operate.
 - d) **Centralised database for gas appliances.** A coroners regulation 28 report by Geraint Williams (relating to those who died due to faulty Beko cookers) has highlighted that there is no obligation for gas appliances to be registered on a database when they are installed. This means that products are not traceable, and early warnings cannot be given if design flaws or badly manufactured appliances are identified. [Minister Paul Scully has responded](#), asking the Office for Product Safety and Standards to engage with relevant groups to consider these concerns.
 - e) **Data on CO.** The APPCOG is working with GST to deliver a workshop to explore opportunities for improving data recording and sharing for CO incidents and cases of exposure. Initially this would consider what facts need to be included in records, and how disparate reporting might be unified. A longer term project outcome would be to develop a more detailed proposal for a unified CO data hub, which could support CO prevalence studies.

Concluding remarks

14. Parliamentarians expressed a strong desire for engagement, and a commitment to facilitate collaboration between MPs and industry in this new period, which was warmly welcomed by GDNs and others present. The APPCOG members will continue to work closely together to develop project proposals and strategic plans which maximise the opportunities available.