

APPCOG Stakeholder Forum - Minutes

Tuesday 9th June 2020

14:00 – 16:00 | Zoom

Chaired by Chris Bielby, *Chair of Gas Safety Trust*

Attendees:

Chris Bielby (CB)	<i>Chair</i>
Andy Curtis (AC)	<i>COGDEM</i>
Andy Speake (ASp)	<i>AICO</i>
Ashley Martin (AM)	<i>Rospa</i>
Avril Samuel (ASa)	<i>KHMT</i>
Calvin May (CM)	<i>HETAS Ltd</i>
Claire O'Meara (COM)	<i>Fire Angel</i>
Clive Shrubsole (CS)	<i>PHE</i>
David Goodall (DG)	<i>Steve Vick International</i>
Emma Fraser (EF)	<i>London Fire Brigade</i>
Gordon Samuel (GS)	<i>KHMT</i>
Howard Cane (HC)	<i>NACE</i>
Ian McCluskey (IMc)	<i>IGEM</i>
Ian Palmer-Smith (IPS)	<i>Domestic and General</i>
Ilora Finlay (IF)	<i>House of Lords</i>
Isabella Myers (IM)	<i>COMed</i>
Karen Page (KP)	<i>Domestic and General</i>
Kevin Tyson (KT)	<i>Boat Safety Scheme</i>
Maureen McIntosh (MM)	<i>SGN</i>
Maureen Nolan (MN)	<i>Gas Safe Charity</i>
Nathaniel Shaughnessy (NS)	<i>Policy Connect</i>
Oona Muirhead (OM)	<i>Policy Connect</i>
Phil Burrows (PB)	<i>Cadent</i>
Phil Cleaver (PC)	<i>Chimney Skills Training</i>
Rebecca Close (RC)	<i>Public Health England</i>
Richard Mendon (RM)	<i>SGN</i>
Rob Lyon (RL)	<i>COGDEM</i>
Sally Thomas (STh)	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>
Scott Darroch (SD)	<i>Gas Safe Register</i>
Stephanie Trotter (STr)	<i>CO-Gas Safety</i>
Tom Bradley (TBr)	<i>Cadent</i>
Tom Bell (TBe)	<i>Northern Gas Networks</i>
Trevor Smallpeice (TS)	<i>TS Enterprises</i>

Apologies:

Adrian Hutt	<i>NFCC</i>	Jonathan Kane	<i>CO Gas Safety</i>
Adrian McConnell	<i>Safety Health Environment</i>	Jonathan Shaw	<i>Policy Connect</i>
Alun Williams	<i>HETAS Ltd</i>	Katherine Atkinson	<i>Safer Tourism Foundation</i>
Andy Shaw	<i>Liverpool John Moores University</i>	Laura Davis	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>
Angela Love	<i>Gas Safe Charity</i>	Malcolm Greetham	<i>Energy and Utility Skills</i>
Cheryl Cox	<i>Certsure</i>	Maria Kokkinaki	<i>Energy UK</i>
Chris Geeves	<i>Federation of British Chimney Sweeps</i>	Mark Jones	<i>Merseyfire</i>
Chris Yates	<i>CORGI</i>	Mark Rolfe	<i>Gas Safe Register</i>
Christine Bridge	<i>HSE</i>	Nigel Winnan	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>
Dan Edwards	<i>SGN</i>	Paisley Henderson	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>
Daniela Rodrigues	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>	Pamela Goe	<i>SGN</i>
David Long	<i>SSE</i>	Paul Collins	<i>Certsure</i>
Derrick Crump	<i>Cranfield University</i>	Paul DeCort	<i>MHCLG</i>
Edward Gill	<i>Energy Networks Association</i>	Paul Overton	<i>CO Gas Safety</i>
Elizabeth Warwick	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>	Paul Rose	<i>OFTEC</i>
Gemma Baguley	<i>IGEM</i>	Pete Kocen	<i>Energy Networks Association</i>
Gordon Lishman	<i>Gas Safe Charity</i>	Peter Ritchie	<i>IOM</i>
Graham Watts	<i>Boat Safety Scheme</i>	Reece Emmitt	<i>Wales & West Utilities</i>

1. Welcome by the chair and apologies

CB welcomed everyone and received apologies.

2. Matters arising since last meeting

None reported.

3. Presentation on CO Alarms Technology (AICO)

ASp presented on the latest CO Alarms Technology on behalf of AICO. A summary of the key points and discussion is included below, please see attached slides for the full presentation. Andy's contact details are listed at the end.

AICO are a domestic smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarm manufacturer. Part of the EI group, they trade in the UK under the brand 'AICO'. AICO are members of CoGDEN. They are currently predominately a B2B provider, selling alarms to social and private landlords.

The British Standards Institute defines two types of CO alarms apparatus. Type B simply refers to an alarm that sounds when CO is detected above a singular, fixed threshold. Type A are more sophisticated and able to detect and respond to differing levels of CO over a period of time. Type A alarms are also able to relay connections to other appliances, with uses including triggering extractor fans, gas cut-off switches, and other alarms.

AICO's AudioLINK software allows you to download data from an alarm onto a smartphone. This downloads the alarm's readings history, including low-levels of background CO, as well as information such as battery level and the time elapsed since the alarm was last removed. Reports can be stored and shared. Uses for this technology include: determining CO levels (and the source of CO) on emergency call-outs, providing proof of CO exposure for survivors, maintenance/period inspections (the alarm auto-tests constantly), and between-tenancy checks. The main limitation of AudioLINK is it requires you to be in the property to download data from alarm.

AICO's RadioLINK is the next step up. This has the same functionality as AudioLINK, but allows you to download the data over a radio frequency using a dongle. This means you can download the data from outside the property, providing you are inside the Radio Frequency range.

Finally, SmartLINK is AICO's latest innovation. This uses radio frequency data extraction to communicate with a 'Gateway unit'. This relays the data to a cloud portal, which can be accessed online from anywhere. Text and email live alerts can be installed. This technology has proven particularly popular for those with vulnerable family members and in assisted living, and has a number of additional uses, for example helping households improve energy efficiency.

Discussion

STr praised the presentation, requested to put the slides on the CO-Gas Safety website, and asked how many people have this technology in order to assess trends, and how long the data is held in the alarm.

ASp confirmed SmartLINK was relatively new, only coming to market in the last few months, but the data extraction technology has existed since 2014. The data is stored for the lifetime

of the alarm (roughly 10 years) and can be downloaded at any time, whilst CloudLINK instantly backs the data up online.

IF echoed ST's praise, and asked about the cost of the alarms, in particular the CloudLINK compatible alarms.

ASp estimated (with the caveat he did not know the exact current sale price), that the basic alarm unit costs £15 and all have RadioLINK technology installed. The Gateway Unit that uploads this data to the Cloud then costs £100 on top, whilst relay units are around £20-30.

IF suggested that a target for the promotion of this technology over the summer should be those parents whose children are going to university and leaving home in the autumn. Text alerts would be particularly useful for peace of mind, notably as those at university may be more likely to confuse the symptoms with that of a hangover. IF also suggested speaking to GDNs regarding the provision of these alarms to vulnerable consumers.

OM suggested two further useful applications for this technology. One for elderly and vulnerable people, as the text alerts' feature would be particularly useful for family members of those in care, in addition to health and care workers. OM noted Policy Connect's inquiry into the risk posed by CO to health and care workers, with one of the key issues identified being a lack of data on levels of exposure. Second, OM suggested the availability of this technology should inform new building regulations, given the cheapest route to ensure this technology is rolled out *en masse* is to install them when the buildings are first constructed.

IM noted the usefulness of this for patients who have been exposed to CO and struggle with receiving an accurate diagnosis. This is particularly relevant for pregnant women struggling with symptoms of pregnancy mirroring those from CO. IM also raised that some of the most vulnerable do not have smartphones, limiting the functionality of this technology for them.

ASp thanked all for their useful feedback, and noted that for those who are not able to afford a smartphone (or the alarm), part of the onus falls on the landlord to assume a duty of care and ensure the property is safe to live in. This responsibility falling on the landlord in part explains the transition away from digital display unit CO monitors, given tenants were unlikely to be able to usefully interpret the readings.

GS asked whether, given the relay is able to turn on an extractor, this could be linked to the boiler to turn off the source of the CO leak. ASp confirmed the relay can be connected to any powered device. GS also asked whether the alarms can be programmed to automatically test regularly (e.g. Test It Tuesday). ASp confirmed that the alarms are constantly self-testing, and will deliver a notification to the phones if anything is going wrong.

MM noted the opportunities for the alarms to support vulnerable customers on the GDN's priority services register, both in terms of CO Safety and helping customers with fuel efficiency and other related vulnerability concerns. MM asked to catch up with ASp separately offline.

CB thanked ASp for a fascinating presentation on behalf of the forum.

Action: NS to share ASp's slides shortly after the discussion, after ASp has added contact details.

4. APPCOG update

Please see written APPCOG update attached.

5. APPCOG Working Group updates

a. COMed (IM)

A virtual meeting of COMed was held on 6th May. The three main topics covered were: CO and Pregnancy, CO and the Cardiovascular system and a short update on CO and the Brain.

CO and Pregnancy: Since lockdown, NHS England have paused CO Screenings for pregnant women. This has caused concern as non-smoking women exposed to high levels of CO who would be identified by screenings are no longer being picked up. The danger is exacerbated by the symptoms crossover with COVID-19 meaning women experiencing symptoms may not take appropriate measures to protect themselves. Baroness Finlay tabled PQs that received a response confirming nothing is being done to mitigate the risk in the absence of these screenings.

COMed is now exploring future paths to help the 10% of most vulnerable women going into the winter, especially given the risk of a second COVID wave. This includes making the case for adding pregnant women to the OfGEM priority services register, applying for research funding for data collection on CO levels in pregnant women's houses, and continuing to improve our scientific understanding of both in-utero exposure and continued exposure in the home.

CO and Cardiovascular outcomes: The group received an excellent presentation from Kat Hawkins (University of Surrey) on her dissertation, looking at designing an adverse outcome pathway for the impact of CO on the CV system. This focussed on the effects of hypoxia (reduction in availability of oxygen to the body) as a result of CO poisoning. It is intended to be written up into an academic paper. COMed members were hugely supportive of this work, and noted the potential for this methodology to be expanded into other impacts of CO on the body to develop parallel AOPs that will aid further research, diagnosis and treatment.

CO and the Brain: COMed's report on the case for a CO Neurology Clinic has been finalised and circulated with the group, and is ready to be published as soon as clinic is able to begin taking patients. The next stage in neurology research may combine the Pregnancy workstream, with a focus on in-utero exposure.

IF noted concern that data from Cadent showed the number of emergency call-outs during lockdown has gone significantly down. This indicated there may be a significantly higher number of faulty appliances going unserviced. IF encouraged the forum to continue highlighting the message that free emergency call-outs are available throughout this period, and ensuring the public know that this service exists.

IF also stressed the importance of changing the NHS-111 algorithm to account for CO symptoms, especially given link to COVID-19 symptoms.

CS confirmed he was meeting this week with PHE officials, but cautioned against anything moving significantly, given the current capacity demands on PHE with many employees having been temporarily repositioned.

b. Comms Group (RL)

SD sent apologies so RL delivered update.

Main focus of the Comms group over the past three months has been gas safety messaging during lockdown, particularly highlighting the link between CO and COVID-19 symptoms, and the risk caused by the increased time spent indoors during lockdown. RL set up a weekly meeting at the start of lockdown given this was such a pressing issue, whilst also working closely with Cadent in this time to develop Safety Seymour resources for home-schooling.

There were initial plans for this to be launched alongside a media day highlighting CO risks in the home in the first few weeks of lockdown, but this proposal was eventually shelved due to concern from the group around spreading further panic.

Additionally in this period, Energy UK created a [COVID-19 information hub](#), with dedicated CO Safety page, and Cadent [uploaded Safety Seymour resources online](#) onto bespoke website. RL strongly encouraged members to share these links with business and personal networks.

Gas Safe Register became a throughput for government guidance on gas safety during COVID-19, working closely with HSE to develop up to date advice for landlords, gas engineers and the public.

The group also invited Hilary Wareing and IM from COMed to discuss the CO and Pregnancy workstream, given concerns within the COMed group that this was struggling to make progress. RL hosted a follow-up call with HW and IM to understand what the Comms group can do to help secure funding for research. RL noted the potential for groups to work more closely together in future.

Finally, the chairs of the group are meeting early next week (16/06) to agree an initial plan and scope for CO Awareness Week, before pitching this out to the wider group.

c. CO SciTech (CB)

CB confirmed he had met with OM and RW since last meeting, and they had collectively agreed a plan for the SciTech group to move forward in the future.

6. Members and Stakeholders Update

a. Katie Haines Memorial Trust (AS)

AS had a significant win with Amazon, who agreed to remove all black-spot detectors from their website with immediate effect. Amazon acted quickly in response to the email, and added to let them know if they are spotted on the website again.

RL added that he is working with KHMT on taking this one step further, and tackling the significant numbers of uncertified alarms that have crept into the wider e-commerce market

b. NGN (TB)

Following a request from community partners, NGN is developing a CO awareness tutorial for leaders of these community groups. TB is happy to share these with the group when the materials have been finalised.

NGN also developed two videos by, for and starring individuals with learning difficulties, in partnership with Botcherby Community Centre and SpeakUp Self Advocacy. The links to both are included below.

[The Great Outdoors \(Botcherby Community Centre\)](#)
[I Can't Smell It? So It Must Be Safe! \(Speakup Self Advocacy\)](#)

c. CoGDEM (AC)

CoGDEM have used the extra time created by the COVID-19 lockdown to revamp and update their entire website, this is going live within next couple of weeks. AC appealed to group to share information that they would like putting on the CoGDEM website, be this either for the public or members' areas.

CoGDEM has hosted an extensive list of standards within its members area for a while, but a decision has been taken to review every standard around the world and list them. The ambition is for this to become one-stop shop for standards information for anything relating to CO, and will be kept constantly updated.

Action (all): AC appealed to anyone involved in developing standards (e.g. participating on working groups) around CO to send through information on this.

Just before lockdown, CoGDEM looking into setting up day for CoGDEM members, HSE and Keele, looking at Hydrogen project. This project was placed on hold but will be restarting as soon as possible.

CB asked whether the good guide to CO alarms could be sent round to forum.

Action: RL to send PDF to NS to circulate to group.

d. RoSPA (AM)

RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) have been focussed since lockdown on the increasing likelihood of domestic accidents occurring, particularly since so many homes have been converted into workplaces over the last few months.

RoSPA created an accident free web-page on the website, which points to a specific piece of CO guidance.

AM also offered to incorporate the resources mentioned today onto the website and into the newsletter.

e. IGEM (IMc)

IGEM had hoped to run another CO event at the back end of this year but due to the COVID-19 this is now planned for the Spring of 2021. IGEM is currently considering options to run a webinar in November to coincide with the CO Awareness week.

The Unsafe Situations Procedure is being revised to provide more clarity around RIDDOR reporting. This will soon be out for industry comment.

In support of the Hydeploy project for blended hydrogen in the network, IGEM will be reviewing the report by progressive energy on the impacts on downstream standards.

Update on the Gas Quality standard which is currently out on the IGEM website for comment. The key changes are i) Gross Wobbe Index 46.5 to 52.85 MJ/M³ (the current emergency limits); ii) New Relative Density ≤ 0.700 ; iii) Oxygen Mole Fraction 1.0% below 38Bar; iv) The removal of the Sooting Index and Incomplete Combustion Factor.

A Consultation Document "A key step on the pathway to Net Zero emissions - EVIDENCE REPORT" has also been prepared which explains the proposed changes to the gas specification and provides references to the supporting technical evidence.

The proposed IGEM standard will be a dynamic framework for changes in gas quality but the enduring safety of domestic consumers will be paramount. Comment period has been extended to the end of July to allow for organisations affected by the current Covid-19 pandemic to respond. IGEM are also in discussion with the HSE on the update to GSMR.

f. CO-Gas Safety

ST praised the efforts of other members of the group to raise awareness during COVID-19, in particular IF's contribution on raising PQs and addressing the shortcomings in the NHS-111 algorithm. ST also praised ASp's presentation, and suggested GDNs having access to the smart alarms data might allow for improved monitoring, whilst allowing people to have a reliable measure of how much CO they were exposed to for medical referrals.

ST delivered an update on CO-Gas Safety continuing its work of collection data and helping victims, including the case of a 9 year old who was apparently poisoned at a school in Scotland.

7. AOB

ST presented a proposal suggestion that OfGEM 'use it or lose it' allowance could be used by GDNs to implement testing of CO levels from faulty devices during emergency call-outs, in order to help victims gain proof that they had been poisoned.

"CO-Gas Safety has concerns for this autumn and winter with regard to CO and Covid-19, given symptoms of CO are similar to any virus, including Covid-19.

ST referenced two recent case studies (available on request), one of Ms Reid who was denied a Gas Engineer due to fears she had COVID (after having had her gas cut off), and one of Ms Wing, who was not offered proper treatment upon arriving in A&E due to having no record of her level of exposure in the house.

CO-Gas Safety are asking if it is possible that CO levels in homes measured and recorded by First Call Operators on emergency call-outs. CO-Gas Safety believe:

This would help victims through providing a written statement of the CO levels (PPM) in their home and/or ideally being emitted from gas appliances shortly after the gas has been switched off but before anyone, including any RGE, has touched the gas appliances other than to turn them off and on again in order to test for CO. A sweep test of the levels in the room could be done after the gas appliances are reconnected to the gas and relit. Any emissions from the gas appliances would have to be tested by an RGE at least qualified under CMDDA1.

Further, this could help establish how much CO was being emitted by each appliance, preventing continuous exposure to levels of CO that cause long-term injury.

CO-Gas Safety have asked if trials on this could begin before this year's heating season restarts, and have suggested that from April onwards this could be funded through the RIIIO-2 innovation allowance to support vulnerable consumers. CO-Gas Safety welcomes input from stakeholders on this suggestion, and if/if not such an initiative is viable."

CB suggested ST draft a written proposal on this, for consideration by GDNs.

TB added that GDNs are currently waiting on OfGEM to clarify how the use it or lose it allowance can be spent, and mentioned this was an allowance for a range of vulnerability issues (not exclusively CO). TB confirmed group happy to consider all proposals, but wouldn't be able to commit to anything until OfGEM had provided further information, as the rules of the scheme were currently unclear.

Action: ST to send CB written proposal, for discussion with GDNs.

Action: NS to add this to the agenda for the next forum.

ST asked about progress on the alarms guide being produced by CoGDDEM, RL confirmed the [UnitedAgainstCO YouTube page](#) had uploaded set of videos detailing the sounds of various CO Alarms.

8. Chair's closing remarks

CB thanked ASp for a fantastic presentation, and lauded the efforts of everyone in the group to achieve 32 participants given the current pandemic. CB also praised ROSPA, Energy UK

and GSR for their recent COVID-19 guidance, whose references to CO Safety would have been viewed widely amongst the general public.

9. Close of meeting