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Gas competition hots up

Residents in Coventry are being given an extra incentive to stay safe this winter and receive a free gas safety check.

Each year 30 people die nationally as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning from badly maintained gas appliances. Hundreds more are hospitalised.

Known as the silent killer, carbon monoxide cannot be seen, tasted or smelt, yet it can have tragic consequences.

Whitefriars Housing Group is required to ensure every boiler inside its 17,000 homes is safe.

The not-for-profit landlord is required to carry out regular safety checks on gas appliances but some tenants refuse to let engineers in - putting their lives and those of their neighbours at risk.

To encourage residents to let contractors do their job, all those who keep their first appointment are being entered into a monthly prize draw to win £50.

This month Mrs Surrinder Kaur, of Radford, scooped the unexpected cash boost.

The 56-year-old, who has lived in the property since 1987, said: "It is a lovely surprise to win. I think everyone should have their boiler serviced as it is in their interest. It could be dangerous otherwise.

"I've already spent my winnings. I needed a mobile phone and the prize money has allowed me to buy one."

The incentive scheme follows the launch of a new policy in 2003. Under this innovative policy, the homes of tenants who ignore repeated pleas to allow the vital checks to go ahead may be broken into.

This policy resulted in Whitefriars being one of the few housing associations that serviced 100 per cent of its properties last year, ensuring the safety of all residents.

Under the policy, before resorting to a forced entry, Whitefriars will ensure that each property is visited, and two subsequent letters sent out to arrange to carry out the safety checks.

If the occupants are out, a card requesting the tenants to call to arrange an appointment is posted through the letterbox.

If there has been no response, a final letter is hand delivered to the tenant requiring them to allow the gas service engineer access at a specific date.

If, following this, no-one has contacted Whitefriars and no-one is present to provide access to the home, the gas contractors will make a forced entry through changing the lock and charging the tenant £95 for a new one.

Jeff Scott, engineering services and contract manager, said: "We have started this new incentive scheme to reward those tenants who make the effort to ensure their safety and those of their neighbours.

"It is only the minority of tenants who don't appreciate the importance of allowing us access for gas safety checks but this is a major concern because we have no way of telling if the home and the people living there are safe."

Ends

**For further information please contact Michelle Hallmark at The Bridge Group on
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