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Silent killer

Whitefriars Housing Group is warning residents to stay safe this winter and get their gas boiler checked.

You can't see, hear, smell or even taste it, but every year about 30 people die from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues which have not been properly maintained.

Whitefriars Housing Group is on a mission to ensure every boiler inside its 18,000 homes is safe. The not-for-profit landlord says it will have to carry out forced entries into the homes of tenants who persist in failing to co-operate.

Whitefriars offers regular free safety checks, but some tenants refuse to let engineers in - putting their lives and those of their neighbours at risk.

Whitefriars tenant board member Joan Allen said: "It is a legal requirement that we ensure each gas appliance is checked for safety at least once a year.

"It is only the minority of tenants that refuse to let us in, but their actions could well put the majority at risk. Whitefriars has measures in place to ensure our contractors turn up at an agreed time, all we ask is the same in return from tenants."

The forced entry policy was launched last year, and resulted in Whitefriars being one of the few housing associations that serviced 100 per cent of its properties.

To build on this initial success, this year it is introducing a new system to ensure all tenants know when the engineer will come knocking.

Checks will be carried out throughout the year on a monthly staggered basis with tenants receiving a reminder two months before their boiler's service is due. So if your boiler was last serviced in May 2004, it is due for its next service in May 2005, with a reminder issued in March.

Tenant board member Colin Young said irresponsible tenants should be stopped: "It is reassuring to hear that Whitefriars' new policy is working and that tenants and their families are safe.

"The forced entry is a last resort, and was only needed on a few occasions, but it is good to know that safety for all has been achieved. Those who don't let the engineers in are just irresponsible and are putting their lives, and those of their neighbours, at risk."

Before forcing access, Whitefriars will ensure that each property is visited at least twice to ask for permission to conduct the safety checks. If the occupants are out, a card requesting the tenants to call to arrange an appointment is posted through the letterbox. Most tenants will also be called on the phone.

If there has been no response, it is at this stage that a final letter is sent to the tenant requiring them to allow the gas service engineer access at a specific time and 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.

All contractors working on behalf of Whitefriars carry the company's identification details which should always be checked before letting anyone in.

Ends

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