

Senate summit to address refrigerant safety issues

CONCERNED ABOUT THE increased use of flammable refrigerants as a result of carbon pricing, 10 industry groups have come together seeking an urgent summit at Parliament House to address safety issues, especially around the use of hydrocarbons.

Airconditioning and Refrigeration Equipment Manufacturers Association (AREMA) president Mark Padwick and Refrigerants Australia (RA) executive director Steve Anderson went to Parliament House to set up the summit with the Parliamentary Secretary of Sustainability, Senator Don Farrell.

Just as CCN was going to press an urgent meeting was set down for the end of March.

A long list of industry groups are participating in the meeting with Senator Farrell including the Australian Industry Group (AIG), the Consumer Electronics Association, the Vehicle Airconditioning Specialists Association of Australasia, the Association of Airconditioning and Mechanical Contractors, the Refrigeration and Airconditioning Contractors Association, the Australian Refrigeration Wholesalers Association, Refrigerant Reclaim Australia and the Australian Institute of Airconditioning Refrigeration and Heating (AIRAH).

RA executive director, Steve Anderson, said the high level of participation is proof of the seriousness of the issue and the need for the government to act immediately.

"It isn't often that so many industry groups will come together with this degree of urgency around a single issue," he said.

"The move to low GWP refrigerants in the Australian market has led to the increased use of flammable refrigerants and we do not have an adequate safety regime in place.

"While these refrigerants are not as flammable as hydrocarbons, they are nonetheless flammable, and we need to ensure proper systems and controls are in place and enforced.

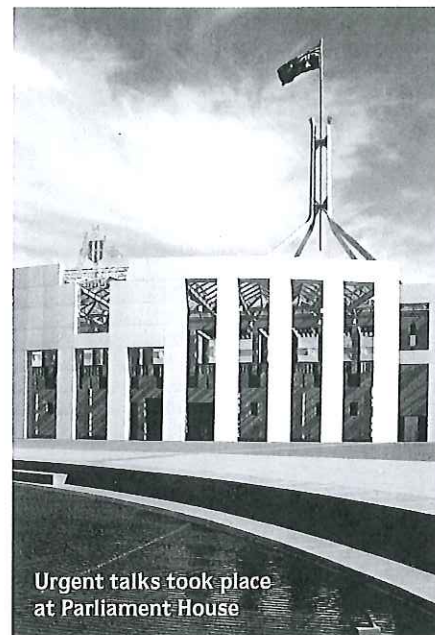
"The continued marketing of highly flammable refrigerants as drop-in replacements in equipment not designed for their use is of great concern."

This issue is of particular concern to manufacturers who warn that their equipment was never made for these highly flammable alternatives and there is a very real risk of fire or an explosion.

The Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Greg Hunt, said this issue is one of the unintended consequences of the carbon tax as customers seek out inferior alternatives to avoid the "massive price shock on refrigerants."

"The goal of the carbon tax is to make refrigerants so expensive that people in small business and industry switch to lower cost alternatives; but these are potentially very dangerous," Hunt told Radio 5AA in Adelaide.

Responding to Hunt's claims, Senator Farrell



Urgent talks took place at Parliament House

said the use of refrigerants is a highly regulated area of industry because of the dangerous nature of some of these substances.

"We will certainly sit down with industry as there is nothing higher on our priority list than the safety of people who work in the industry and the consumers that will ultimately be using these products."

The federal government and industry are currently working on a Code of Practice for Flammable Refrigerants but industry groups are demanding further action. A full report on the summit will appear in the next issue of CCN.

Company charged over gas explosion

A DARWIN BUSINESS has been charged over a gas explosion that killed a 24-year-old refrigeration mechanic.

The tradesman, Paddy Bird, was killed instantly when his work van exploded in the driveway of his Parap home in Darwin in December 2011.

The refrigeration mechanic had pressurised flammable gas cylinders in his vehicle when the accident happened.

Berrimah-based firm Damday has been charged over the accident. The Northern Territory Work Health Authority alleges the company was in breach of an employer's general statutory duty of care.

The charge has been laid under provisions of the Workplace Health and Safety Act that was in force at the time of the accident.

It has since been repealed and replaced with new legislation. The maximum penalty for the charge is \$650,000.

The matter is currently before the courts.