

Refrigerant driving licence 'will save many lives'

3 years ago



The [Building Engineering Services Association](#) (BESA) has welcomed the long-awaited launch of the United Nations Refrigerant Driving Licence (RDL) scheme to help improve worldwide safety standards in the air conditioning and refrigeration industries.

More than a decade in the making, the scheme was launched at [a conference for signatories to the Montreal Protocol](#) hosted by the [UN Environment Programme](#) (UNEP) in Bangkok. It seeks to help developing nations achieve higher competence standards in safe refrigerant handling through training and accreditation of operatives.

BESA, which operates the UK's primary refrigerant management registration scheme [REFCOM](#), said the timing was significant because of the rapid growth in the use of new 'alternative' refrigerant gases. These are designed to replace traditional global warming equivalents but are often more flammable so require users to have more stringent safety training.

The Association's technical director Graeme Fox was one of the founders of the RDL scheme and hailed its launch as a "significant development for the worldwide refrigerant industry that will save many lives".

"A lot of countries do not enjoy the training and technical infrastructure we take for granted in Europe and the rest of the developed world," he said. "Many of those countries still want to progress and adopt more environmentally friendly refrigerants. However, the speed of the transition to new gases is causing some very serious safety issues and there have already been several deaths caused by the mishandling of these substances."

Flammable

The European Union is currently debating a further strengthening of its F-Gas regulations, which would lead to an even faster pace of change away from higher global warming potential (GWP) gases to flammable alternatives. Changes in large developed markets are quickly reflected in other parts of the world as manufacturers adapt their production strategies.

The African industry is concerned that it is being used as a 'guinea pig' to test refrigerant transition, and the U-3ARC, which represents companies in all 54 African states, called for a halt to their introduction until technicians were properly trained.

"This preliminary training must be accompanied by a vast awareness campaign among end users of these technologies which can cause disasters for humans, in terms of fires, even if they are beneficial for the environment," the organisation said in an open letter.

It said the risks were "enormous" and that "the protection of the environment only makes sense if the human being, who is at its centre, benefits from it".

Fox, who is also President of the [Institute of Refrigeration](#), said this showed how important the RDL scheme would be and urged the industry to share its expertise and resources to upskill the global workforce. He also asked regulators to be patient as efforts were stepped up to raise standards.

"European legislators deserve praise for seeking to set the pace on reducing global warming, but changes need to be proportionate and practical," he said. "We must be mindful that one of the consequences of limiting the use of conventional refrigerants is that many developing nations with minimal expertise end up handling large amounts of flammable gas.

"The RDL will, given time, immeasurably improve professional standards worldwide and allow for the gradual and safe adoption of more environmentally benign substances."