

Calor Gas - selective comparison

Many oil distributors appear to have been on Calor Gas's mailing list for its new trade magazine, 'The Burning Issue'. The magazine is aimed at the installer market and contains two articles denigrating oil as a heating source.

One of these articles discusses oil pollution, implying that it is common and widespread wherever oil is stored. There is no mention of any of the comparable issues with LPG. After all, leaks are not confined only to oil pipes but can also occur in gas pipes, with far more serious consequences if an explosion occurs.

The other article gives a comparison of the costs of installing an LPG and an oil central heating system. However, the comparison is somewhat selective and is economical with the truth in many aspects. For example, it compares the cost of purchasing an oil tank with one year's rental for an LPG tank. Other costs that it gives for oil are higher than they should be, but nowhere does it mention or compare running costs! All in all very misleading for consumers, to whom the installers will be giving advice. Another article offers installers cash for leads that convert into a domestic Calor customer - not a great incentive to the installer to give customers impartial advice.

The supply of domestic bulk LPG in the UK is already the subject of investigation by the Office of Fair Trading. One of the practices that the OFT has reported that it suspects, in the light of a preliminary inquiry, is that "the provision of domestic bulk LPG has several features which may impede customers switching between companies, principally the charges to the customer for the removal of the current supplier's tank and for the installation of the new supplier's tank."

FPS has submitted evidence to the Office of Fair Trading that the magazine has been unfairly selective in the information it has chosen to publish, resulting in a misleading costs comparison. Because the information has been circulated to existing and potential LPG installers, it is likely to be widely disseminated to existing and potential customers. We have therefore asked the OFT to consider whether Calor Gas has contravened the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations, which came into force in 1988. We will keep FPS members informed of the response from OFT.