

# Safety Alert from the Health and Safety Authority

## Wood Pellet Feed Hoppers/Tanks

Although outside the remit of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) under present legislation, information has come to the attention of the HSA which warrants issuing a general alert.

The HSA is issuing an urgent alert to operators, maintenance personnel and members of the public on the dangers associated with bulk feed hoppers/tanks normally used with Wood Pellet Boilers. This alert follows a fatal accident where a home owner entered a bulk wood pellet storage hopper/tank and was overcome by carbon monoxide (CO) gas. CO is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas that is highly toxic.

Wood Pellet Boilers are commonly used in homes and businesses as an alternative to the oil or gas fired boilers. Wood pellets, the fuel source for these units are normally housed in a large sealed hopper/tank that is either fitted with screw feeder (auger) connected to the boiler, or the hopper/tank is mounted over the boiler for gravity feeding. Due to the enclosed nature of these hoppers/tanks the atmosphere inside can become oxygen depleted and a toxic atmosphere can accumulate. The HSA is asking all operators, maintenance personnel and users of this equipment to do the following

1. **DO NOT ENTER** or place your head into the wood pellet hopper under any circumstances. The unit can contain toxic gases.
2. Ensure that your wood pellet hopper/tank and boiler has been installed and commissioned by a competent person. If in doubt, contact the supplier and/or manufacturer and request assistance.
3. Ensure that the boiler is cleaned and serviced by a competent person at the frequency required by the manufacturers' instructions.
4. If any problems are encountered with the unit, such as, system not heating correctly, flue gas is flowing into boiler room, turn unit off and seek assistance immediately.
5. No personnel should enter the hopper/tank unless fully trained and competent in confined space entry procedures. The hopper/tank should be fully ventilated and controls put in place to ensure safe entry as per the HSA Code of Practice "Safe Work in Confined Spaces"
6. Ensure boiler room is well ventilated at all times to ensure no inadvertent build up of toxic gases.

### Additional Information

- HSA Code of Practice "Safe Work in Confined Spaces" which is available on the HSA website at the following link:  
[http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications\\_and\\_Forms/Publications/Codes\\_of\\_Practice/COP\\_Confined\\_Space\\_Document.pdf](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Codes_of_Practice/COP_Confined_Space_Document.pdf)
- Further information in relation to Carbon Monoxide may be obtained at [www.carbonmonoxide.ie](http://www.carbonmonoxide.ie)