F-gas revision: Bans, phase outs and an end to pre-charged equipment

HFC phase-downs, usage bans in certain products, a stop to the use of R404A and an end to the sale of pre-charged air conditioning and refrigeration equipment are just some of the proposed revisions to the new European F-gas regulations revealed in a leaked document this week.

The document, which will both shock and delight different sectors of the air conditioning and refrigeration industry, also extends training and certification to cover the so-called "natural" refrigerants and extends the regulations to include refrigerated trucks, trailers and reefers.

The proposals call for a ban on HFCs with a GWP over 2150 in new hermetically-sealed commercial fridges and freezers and in industrial refrigeration by 2015. This will be extended to include all commercial fridges and freezers by 2016. This will mainly affect R404A, used extensively in supermarket systems with its GWP of 3780, but will also affect the other high GWP replacement gases including R417A, R417B and R422D.

The proposals in the leaked document then go further to include outright bans on HFCs in hermetically sealed commercial refrigerators and freezers by 2017 and in the other systems mentioned by 2020.

Other equipment will be affected by the phase down proposals which are said to have gone further than many feared. Using a base figure of an average of the annual consumption of HFCs over the four year period of 2008-2011, the document proposes a reduction to 93% of this figure by 2017, 63% by 2020, 45% by 2023, 31% by 2026, 24% by 2029 and 21% by 2030.

While the exact proposals will not be seen until early December, Cedric Sloan, director general of the UK manufacturers' association FETA, said "The RACHP industry must brace itself for a range of measures with further resource implications, probably over a short time scale, on top of what has already been imposed."

Referring to the "tens of millions of pounds" he estimated it had cost UK industry alone to implement the F-gas regulations, he added "Without evidence that this is not being effective, it now proposes to add to the burden on our sector and customers. How can expensive unnecessary regulation be introduced across Europe, where emission reduction targets are being met, when the rest of the world is taking no similar action? Who is accountable for such politically motivated impositions on a struggling industry?"

Graeme Fox, president of the European refrigeration and air conditioning group AREA, was more upbeat about the proposals describing as "fantastic" the intention to introduce mandatory training on alternative refrigerants and a ban on the importation and sale of pre-charged equipment, a proposal which AREA had itself championed.

Referring to the pre-charged ban, he said "This will provide a huge stick against the cowboys and ensure that systems are properly charged and operating efficiently."

EPEE, the European Partnership for Energy and the Environment, which also represents the
European air conditioning and refrigeration industry at parliamentary level, has so far not commented on the leaked document.

Cedric Sloan, meanwhile, has called for all those concerned about the revisions to contact their MP and regional MEPs (MEP details are at: www.europarl.org.uk).

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