

Customers in vulnerable situations

Winter readiness and Carbon
Monoxide (CO) Awareness
Workshop



13th September 2022

together
we are
the **network**

Thank you

Thank you again to those of you who joined us for our Winter readiness and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Awareness Workshop on Tuesday 13th September.

Myself, Jill, Steph, Jenny and our facilitators thoroughly enjoyed seeing you all again. A special thank-you to our guest presenters Sophie Dawson from Harvey and Hugo and Laura Ratcliffe from Citizens Advice Northumberland. Sophie provided an insight into the reach of our PR campaigns, associated impact and also our upcoming campaigns for this Winter. Laura provided a case study from one of the customers they have helped at Citizens Advice Northumberland recently and the types of enquiries they are currently receiving, due to the cost of living and energy crises.

Eileen Brown

Customer Experience Director

Purpose of the workshop

- NGN Annual Reports submitted to Ofgem (VCMA both individual and collaborative and stakeholder) - stakeholder feedback using Slido
- VCMA CO projects - individual and collaborative update shared with stakeholders
- CO awareness research 2022
- Partner spotlight and case study Harvey and Hugo/Citizen's Advice
- Breakout 1 - cost of living crisis. Does this present a greater risk to CO safety? If so, what more should we be doing to support our customers?
- NGN actions to prepare for winter. Explaining the actions that extend beyond CO safety and supporting customers through energy / cost of living crises
- Breakout 2 - Partner preparations for winter / what are they doing?

NGN Annual Reports submitted to Ofgem (VCMA both individual and collaborative and Stakeholder) - stakeholder feedback using Slido

The 3 annual reports were shown to the group, it was explained that NGN wanted some feedback on whether anyone had read the reports or not. A series of Slido questions were asked:

Question Q1.

Have you read our NGN VCMA report?

Yes – 53%

No – 47%

Question Q2.

Only vote if you answered yes on the previous question. How useful was the VCMA report to you?
(1 = Not at all useful / 10 = Really useful)

8.3 out of 10

Question Q3.

Why have you given this score?

- Informative and useful to share with wider team
- Have seen elements of the report but not the full report
- Case studies really helpful
- Other priorities I'm afraid!
- A useful report giving details on the various VCMA projects
- **Comprehensive overview of the funding and case studies were particularly informative**
- It gives a clear explanation as to how decisions are made
- Read a bit of it but didn't finish as a lot going on
- Apologies, I haven't had sight of the report to read through

- Helpful to understand the scope of VCMA support
- Unaware of report
- I haven't had a chance to read the report yet, but I will
- Haven't seen it or knew how to access it
- Good overview – informative

Question Q4.

Have you read the GDN VCMA collaborative report?

Yes – 57%

No – 43%

Question Q5.

Only vote if you answered yes on the previous question. How useful was the collaborative report to you?
(1 = Not at all useful / 10 = Really useful)

8.3 out of 10

Question Q6.

Why have you given this score?

- **Interesting to read about how schemes have helped 'real life' householders and the impact that funding and support has made**
- A good overview from across all regions of the variety of projects funded by VCMA
- Was lengthy but interesting and good to see the collaborative approach
- Haven't seen this. I am attending on behalf of someone else who I am sure would have seen the reports
- Link came through in correspondence to this workshop, so I have managed to

- glance through it. Some really useful information
- More succinct than the previous report
- Informative
- Haven't seen the full report
- Haven't seen this one either
- Helpful overview of the national picture
- Not got round to reading this one

Question Q7.

Have you read our NGN Stakeholder report?

Yes – 38%

No – 62%

Question Q8.

Only vote if you answered yes on the previous question. How useful was the stakeholder report to you?
(1 = Not at all useful / 10 = Really useful)

8.3 out of 10

Question Q9.

Why have you given this score?

- **Good overview of engagement methods and outcomes**
- Always good to have information of relevant projects
- Reading this was less of a priority than the other 2 VCMA reports
- Again, I haven't unfortunately come across the report to read
- Always more to be achieved
- Haven't seen this one either
- I haven't had time to read it yet, but I will do

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) CO projects individual and collaborative update

NGN have invested approximately 40% of their overall VCMA spend to tackle CO safety and when stakeholders were engaged with earlier this year, they said it was about right. Over the last 12 months, NGN have developed both regional projects and collaborative projects, with partners ranging across healthcare; local government; housing; education, as well as broad reaching media campaigns.

Stakeholders were made aware of two VCMA projects focused on CO awareness:

Collaborative GDN project - Scout Association

Jill explained young people are one of the groups most at risk from CO poisoning and one of the least aware of the dangers of CO. The GDN's have formed a three-year partnership with Scouts through VCMA. The Scouts are embedding CO awareness activities across its age ranges, this includes sponsorship of the Cubs 'Home Safety' badge, which displays the GDN's new CO alarm logo. The GDN's are also embedding CO training materials for adult Scout volunteers 35,696 young people educated on the dangers of CO, with 2,646 Partnership sponsored Cub Home Safety badges awarded. Any learning is being used to identify other opportunities to educate young people in group settings.

NGN specific project - Durham County Council's GP Partnering Pilot

The project is a significant step forward in making direct contact with households at risk of cold-related ill health and CO poisoning. Working with 9 GP practices to specifically support those with diagnosed respiratory problems, around CO awareness within County Durham. Partnering with Clinical Commissioning Group GP practices allows the council's Warm Homes Team to make direct contact with vulnerable patients, as well as provide advice around fuel poverty and associated issues. Home visits offered for individual cases. Additional support offered –PSR registrations, fuel poverty grants to existing households where coal is still the fuel source, fire service home safety visits. 11,327 reached (letters/questionnaires), 546 direct beneficiaries, 439 pre and post CO awareness questionnaires completed, 111 home safety visit referrals to fire and rescue, 296 ECO grants accessed.



NGN have invested 40% of their total VCMA spend to tackle CO safety

CO awareness research 2022

Eileen informed stakeholders that NGN commissioned PSR and CO research earlier this year and the results were received in August. The results suggest:

- Awareness of CO has gone up in 2022, with more customers claiming they are more aware (improved from 54% to 61%) and their awareness has increased over the past few years (from 48% to 57%)
- More participants in 2022 recalled specific campaigns that raised awareness of CO (increased from 23% to 46%)
- Owning CO alarm: result is relatively stable among those who know what alarms they have, but there has been a shift from "Don't have one" to "Don't know if I have one" and "Have one but can't remember what type"

This suggests that customers are more aware of gas related topics. While the energy crisis plays a part in raising awareness of gas appliances, this is positive news.



61%

CO awareness has increased in 2022, from 54% to 61%

Harvey and Hugo

– partner spotlight session

Sophie Dawson from Harvey and Hugo (NGN PR campaign partner) spoke about two of NGN's previous PR campaigns and upcoming campaign.

1. Don't blame the campaign:

Took place Christmas 2021, the aim of this campaign was to make the public aware of the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning and to demonstrate that symptoms can be similar to that of a hangover or food poisoning. The aim was also to educate about the appropriate action to take, if anyone suspected the deadly gas was present.

The key messages in this campaign centred around the theme of 'Don't blame... the sprouts / the hangover / the flu / overindulging' and more, with the aim of reiterating this vital safety message in a personable and relatable manner.

This campaign was aimed at all members of the general public and delivered through a multi-channel campaign, including:

- Press release targeting media in NGN regions
- Radio advertising on Heart Yorkshire and Smooth Northeast
- Organic social media content
- Social media advertising
- Social media graphics / animations
- Results:
- Overall social media impressions for CO messages - 306,456
- Two radio adverts played 336 times to an estimated 840,000 (one advert focused on CO symptoms)
- Press release received 18 pieces of coverage, with a combined readership of 690,598

2. CO Heroes campaign:

The aim of this campaign was to raise awareness amongst the most at-risk audiences of the dangers of CO, increase their knowledge around the signs and symptoms of CO and encourage members of the public to become CO Heroes, by spreading the messages. Key audiences for this campaign were:

- Students
- Those in private rented accommodation
- Pregnant women
- Those with managed health conditions
- Ethnic minority communities
- Communities where English is not the first language
- Results:
- Organic social media reach: 5,706 accounts
- Social media advertising reach: 133,727

- accounts
- Press release received 9 pieces of coverage, with combined readership of 4,131,289 – Will to bold out
- Toolkit was distributed to 352 contacts across the key audiences
- The survey landing and education pages received 14,576 unique views

Upcoming activity

3. Cost of living campaign*

The cost-of-living crisis will be affecting millions of customers across the NGN patch. This campaign is designed to highlight the importance of staying safe despite these difficulties - the cost of living is rising, but it isn't worth your life. It's important not to cut corners when it comes to gas safety. As with previous campaigns, this will follow a multi-channel approach, to ensure all audiences are being reached. The main part of activity will be case study videos, with NGN engineers sharing real-life stories and examples to give messages a real relatable aspect. Other activity is likely to include:

- Press release sharing these videos with wider media
- Organic social media
- Social media advertising
- Potential distribution to stakeholders and community groups

*Campaign is currently in the planning stage and elements may change

Citizen's Advice Northumberland

Case Study - Dangerous coping strategies - CO risk

Laura Ratcliffe from Citizen's Advice Northumberland talked about a case study of customer they have been in contact with recently:

'Client is a retired female of pensionable age, who lives alone in rural Northumberland. Property is old, privately owned, all electric, in an exposed location. It is poorly insulated, typically cold and 'hard to heat'. The client is also accessing mental health support and is therefore vulnerable due to a variety of factors. Client was referred to Citizens Advice Northumberland by the Northumberland Communities Together Team within the Local Authority and was seeking help to top up her electric pre-payment meter due to having a gap in income. Upon initial contact with CA Northumberland energy team, our administrator recalled an alarming conversation with the client, during which she told us that she had purchased a portable barbeque and was using this in her kitchen, on top of and instead of her oven, to save on cooking costs. The client was very pleased that she had come up with this clever idea to cook whilst she had no income to be able to top up her meter and was completely oblivious to any potential risks in doing so.

Our administrator advised the client to immediately stop using the barbeque indoors, alerting her to the potential risks in doing so before passing the client on to the energy adviser to deliver fuller awareness and advice around Carbon Monoxide risks, and signs and symptoms of CO poisoning. The client noted that a family member had told her she had been 'very sleepy' recently, a likely symptom. This advice was delivered under funding provided by the Gas Distribution Networks, and we believe it ultimately saved a life. The client was extremely grateful to receive this advice, especially considering that she had no concept of risk in relation to the use of the barbeque indoors, or any wider carbon monoxide awareness. We continue to support the client around wider issues, including emergency fuel provision, energy efficiency advice, insulation measures, income maximisation and wider support issues.'

Breakout session - cost of living crisis.

Does this present a greater risk to CO safety? If so, what more should we be doing to support our customers...

Breakout session – cost of living crisis.

Does this present a greater risk to CO safety? If so, what more should we be doing to support our customers

Three questions were posed for discussion as detailed below:

- Does the cost of living / energy crises present a greater risk to CO safety?
 - Impact on gas safety / theft of gas
 - Other unsafe behaviours
- If so, what more should we be doing to support our customers?
- What are the concerns of you and / or your partners around gas safety in general?

Overall stakeholder feedback, in relation to all of the questions posed, was as follows:

Does the cost of living / energy crises present a greater risk to CO safety?

- Customers are putting off safety checks / measures. Not calling out engineers for servicing etc.
- CA advised from surveys they undertake, greater concerns on tenures that are not rented through social landlords / LA's. Greater concerns around owner-occupiers and private rented sectors
- Point raised by CA that it needed to be an easy process for customers on PSR to access free appliance safety checks. Currently difficult to contact suppliers due to energy crisis and increased customer bases as a result of suppliers going into administration.
 - Suggest looking at easier routes for

this support for customers

- Evidence of unsafe behaviours – FB pages advising of unsafe tips to keep warm e.g. BBQ's in homes. Northern Powergrid also advised of being made aware of fires being lit indoors to keep warm
- Local fire and rescue help Durham CC to raise awareness of their offer of free boiler service through their Warm and Healthy Homes scheme
- Northern Powergrid suggested although education and awareness is happening this is not making a difference as many people are desperate
- Hull & East Yorkshire Children's University – Families are going to cut corners, unsafe appliances. Families were already struggling before recent increases. Particularly interested in safety of children
- South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue – already seeing changes e.g. using disposable BBQs and camping stoves indoors. Un-serviced appliances is a concern (low level CO). Do recommend that should use a CO detector as there is a fire risk associated with this as well
- Green Doctor – have been seeing for some months that people are not having gas appliances serviced. The higher risk is now when people turn the heating on. Unsafe portable heater use is also increasing as people turn to alternative

forms of heating

- Delivering safety message is difficult when other messages customers are hearing are that it's cheaper as cheaper could be more of a pressing concern
- Clothes and towels being placed on top is a fire risk as well
- Burning irregular non-traditional fuels to save money – open fireplaces
- People are panicking and the media has caused a mass worry to customers
- People are keeping their oven doors open to keep warm
- Cost of CO alarms and unsafe landlords – even though the regulation has changed some landlords still aren't installing CO alarms
- People are scared to switch on their heating – risk of self-disconnection

What more support should we be giving our customers?

- Suggestion of portable CO alarms for front line workers who go into properties
- Citizen's Advice advised about partnership with Northumberland CC around warm spaces/warm places where people can get a drink etc and be giving information. This includes libraries
- Could NGN's winter campaign be extended to target warm spaces / warm places venues to target those people attending the venue
- More to do around spreading the message about using alternative heating or cooking and the dangers around this
- Increased risk of other fuels that cause CO – NGN could raise more awareness of this as its not just gas that causes CO – NGN could work with wider partners outside gas networks to address this issue
- Engaging younger people to spread the awareness messages – targeted at younger people and use real life case studies
- Shared social media content
- Green Doctor - done a video for WYFRS for raising awareness of fuel poverty & issues to look out for on safe & well visits
- Getting together collateral including films of engineers
- Concern of whether messages would be trusted by customers if they're coming from NGN.
- Hull & East Yorkshire Children's University – using schools for CO awareness. 2000 children targeted – gets information to families
- NGN does absolute best – there is a limit to what they can do. Some responsibility falls to Government
- Green Doctor - I feel we could do more on building the relationship with NGN's engineers to enable a direct referral route for fuel poverty cases. Could NGN engineers help with direct referrals?

What are the concerns of you and / or your partners around gas safety in general?

- Difficult to understand who is going to have the greater impact of the energy crisis
- Unsafe heating practices – fires are a particular risk, could be a bigger risk to the older generation
- Potential for people to resort to older ways – using candles and open fires

NGN actions to prepare for winter. Broader than CO safety and supporting customers through energy / cost of living crisis

Compensation payments

In response to the cost-of-living crisis, NGN are changing the existing Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOP) compensation payments, relating to loss of gas supply. Customers are eligible for a compensation payment of £60 if supply is interrupted for over 24 hours, and then for each 24 hours after that.

NGN are going to make an early payment to customers, within the first 24 hours. This is to reflect the sharp increase in electricity costs to run alternative heating and cooking during the interruption and is likely to be £30 for any interruptions that last between 4 hours and 24 hours. This will be in place from October onwards.

Heat the person, not the home

NGN are working with suppliers to look at purchasing a stock of support items such as heated blankets, heated throws, heated seat covers, that can be deployed to vulnerable customers during gas interruptions.

These must be low energy solutions, and through accredited suppliers.

Keeping the gas boiler working during a power outage

NGN have a project to develop a 'technical and operational battery solution' that can be used by customers when the weather is likely to be cold enough to present risks to residents. This will be used to power the boiler, therefore keeping our most vulnerable customers warm during power outages. This is in partnership with Northern Powergrid.

Breakout session

Partner preparations
for winter / what are
they doing?

Breakout session - Partner preparations for winter / what are they doing?

What are partners doing themselves to get ready for winter?

- Citizens Advice receiving lots of requests for small community groups to have awareness raising sessions around energy efficiency etc. (Age UK). Currently don't have capacity, could do with dedicated resource. Some attendees are digitally excluded
- ECO4 challenges – could there be opportunities to tap into other funding streams for support around appliances? Servicing etc
- Northern Powergrid supporting Citizens Advice Northumberland around a project on energy and debt advice, hardship fund for heating system repairs/ fuel top ups
- Fact that NGN have opened up their office is seen as a positive move
- Helping the helpless
- Schools contribute to travel costs for trips arranged. Their budgets are under huge pressures and trips could be seen as the nice to have
- South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue - looking into all support available from our Partners to ensure they are delivering those resources and support during our home safety checks, developing campaigns to look at fire safety
- Yorkshire Energy Doctor - Drop-in sessions with local food banks, libraries etc. Source funding for top up vouchers. Update event for community energy

ambassador courses – update on the energy crisis, what to do when people get into debt, CO advice. Slow cooker demonstrations and provide customers with slow cookers with the help of Community Action Northumberland

- Gas Safe Charity – Educating front line staff and volunteers around CO and the risks. Offer free workshops and free E-learning
- NGN's Customer Engagement Group – events like this is extremely important to helping them understand what we are doing to support organisations and helps assess what NGN are doing

What more could and should NGN be doing?

- Suggestion to provide CO alarms to more organisations e.g., foodbanks for vulnerable clients
- Suggestion to share CO films on YouTube with stakeholders – Katie.Haines.com to raise awareness
- LA delivering winter roadshows/ issuing newsletter with advice
- Could NGN do more to subsidise trips? How are schools going to cope?
- It's not just about the money – help with flyers, volunteers, access to the business.
- ■ Focus on long-term issues – missing out on school trips will have a long-term impact to children Hull & East Yorkshire Children's University work with
- NGN staff have 2 volunteer days per year could volunteering opportunities be co-ordinated. Also targeting those people

- who aren't using their 2 volunteer days
- Servicing boilers is expensive – could NGN offer a free boiler service or CO check? Perhaps targeting certain areas and promoting will be conducting visits on those days
- Look at projects over a longer term rather than a year – gives a lot of uncertainty especially when they take on staff with a 12-month contract
- Is there a way to proactively analyse customers that haven't had their boiler services – could do this through partners?
- People don't understand the difference between distribution and supply and what NGN do – this may create scepticism around customers when delivering projects
- Work in partnerships with universities to get messaging out there to students – use social media
- NGN could link strategic partners up with partners such as Accent to help with marketing research

Event Evaluation and Future Engagement – 7 feedback responses (MS Forms) / 18 attendees

Event Evaluation		
Summary:	Customers in Vulnerable Situations Winter readiness and CO awareness Workshop	Tuesday 13th September 2022
Q1	What do you want to get out of today?	
Q2	Choose 2 words from this list below to describe this event	Interesting, Insightful, Useful
Q3	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	9.3
Q4	How would you rate the discussions?	9.1
Q5	How would you rate the event contact and speakers? (Out of 5)	4.8
Q6	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seemed to cover essential points • No • Really good session with about the right length of time and numbers of participants in the breakout rooms. Prompted some ideas for our work this winter. Would have liked to have seen some slides for the lady presenting about the CO campaign work to see what types of things they did • Case study worked well to lead into discuss (as they do in the reports) worth thinking if more of these will support the discussion a little more
Q7	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A valuable session with lots of relevant content • Overall a really insightful session. The breakout rooms worked really well and it was useful to hear more from specific partners to understand what they're doing with customers and how that can then affect what is being done in NGN campaigns. • Not really- would be useful if there was a film or PowerPoint that we could share with other groups • No • Thought our facilitator did a great job of enabling discussions and summarising the points made

Q8	Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN	9.6
Q9	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
	NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	Strongly agree 2 Agree 4 Somewhat agree 0 Neither agree nor disagree 0 Somewhat disagree 0 Disagree 0 Strongly disagree 1
	NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	Strongly agree 1 Agree 4 Somewhat agree 1 Neither agree nor disagree 0 Disagree 0 Strongly disagree 1
	NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	Strongly agree 3 Agree 3 Somewhat agree 0 Neither agree nor disagree 0 Somewhat disagree 0 Disagree 0 Strongly disagree 1
	NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	Strongly agree 2 Agree 4 Somewhat agree 0 Neither agree nor disagree 0 Disagree 0 Strongly disagree 1
	NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change	Strongly agree 3 Agree 3 Somewhat agree 0 Neither agree nor disagree 0 Somewhat disagree 0 Disagree 0 Strongly disagree 1

Future Engagement

Q10	How else would you like to engage with NGN in future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · No complaints · Further details of some of the routes to specific funds for customers, how to access etc. · I'm happy with the level of engagement that I currently have with NGN.
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Date of next workshops and other engagement

Date	Workshop topic
22nd November 2022	CIVS Hot Topic workshop online – PSR and data sharing – 10am to 12pm
7th February 2023	CIVS Hot Topic workshop online – Financial Hardship – 10am to 12pm
25th April 2023	CIVS Annual Strategic workshop – venue TBC – 10:00 - 13:00

Tell us what you think

Thank you for reading this report. We welcome any further feedback, thoughts, or ideas you have. Please drop us a line on at stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

Contact numbers for NGN team

Eileen Brown, Customer Experience Director – 07789 007719 / ebrown@northerngas.co.uk

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Steve Dacre, Vulnerability & Innovations Lead – 07778 733867 / sdacre@northerngas.co.uk

Stephanie Ord, VCMA Project Coordinator – 07704 545200 / sord@northerngas.co.uk

Customer Support Fund – contact information

Groundwork can provide support with benefit assessments and support in making benefit applications

- www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/green-doctor or call 0113 2380601

Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT) - Working in partnership with the Gas Safe Charity, funding and support is available for the repair/replacement of gas appliances for eligible owner-occupiers who can't afford to pay. The fund can facilitate urgent repairs and safety related support via Home Improvement Agencies

- www.foundations.uk.com/how-we-help/foundations-independent-living-trust/ or call 0300 124 0315.

Tell us what you think

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