Make sure gas safety is a key part of your caravanning holiday plans

As caravans across Victoria are prepared for the Easter break or in readiness to hit the road north to follow the winter sun, it is important owners double-check all safety aspects inside and out.

Today’s caravans and recreational vehicles come in all shapes, sizes and levels of comfort. One thing they have in common is that they are restricted spaces where people spend time relaxing, cooking, eating and sleeping. Most also use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for cooking, heating and in some instances refrigeration, which means it is vital to check the safety and integrity of the vehicle’s gas systems.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), Prue Digby, said the Plumbing Regulations 2008 clearly specify work in relation to caravans that can only be done by an appropriately licensed or registered plumber.

“Installation and maintenance of LPG appliances and connections in caravans and recreational vehicles must be done by a VBA licensed gasfitter,” Ms Digby said.

“Installation of LPG appliances must be in accordance with Australian Standard AS 5601 – Gas Installation, section 6, which prescribes the gas installation requirements for recreational vehicles and caravans. All work must comply with the relevant standard and have a compliance certificate issued where required.

“It is also important to have an appropriately qualified person check the vehicle for carbon monoxide entering the cabin area,” Ms Digby said.

There are certain things owners can do in relation to LPG systems in their caravans or recreational vehicles as part of checking and preparing them for use, including:

- Check that the gas fitting line is sound and free of damage
- Make sure flexible hose assemblies are in good working order
- Ensure all warning labels are legible
- Check the gas cylinder compartment, which must house only the cylinder(s) and their associated equipment
- Have appliances serviced by a licensed gasfitter, including checked for carbon monoxide entering the cabin, known as “spillage”
- Ensure that all vents are free of obstruction and clean to enable adequate air supply is available inside – there should be at least two ventilation openings.

Ms Digby said that where the Plumbing Regulations are not complied with - either through an unregistered person doing regulated plumbing work or a licensed or registered plumber not meeting their obligations - the VBA will investigate and take action where appropriate.

“Having the holiday maker’s safety in mind, all gas work done by a plumbing practitioner on a caravan or recreational vehicle must be accompanied by a compliance certificate where required and must comply with the relevant standard,” she said.

Prosecutions follow non-compliant work on caravans

Where plumbing work on gas services and appliances in caravans is alleged to have been done by people who were not registered or licensed with the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), the VBA will take appropriate action in the Magistrate’s Court.

In one case in 2013, a business owner who was not licensed or registered with the VBA faced three charges relating to gasfitting work and two charges over water supply work on three commercial type caravans manufactured by his business. No compliance certificates could be provided for the three caravans. The business owner was fined $9000 with no conviction recorded.

In a second case, a prosecution was conducted after an LPG vapour explosion occurred after an unlicensed and unregistered person installed an electrical power point in a caravan. In doing the work, the LPG inlet pipe from the stove/cooktop was disconnected but not properly reconnected after the installation, leading to LPG vapour leaking into the caravan. The first time the LPG was turned on by the owners following the electrical work there was an LPG vapour explosion that damaged the caravan and caused superficial burns to the owners.

The work performed in this case is classified as gasfitting work, as defined in the *Plumbing Regulations 2008*, and can only be done by someone licensed or registered with the VBA to do work of that type or class. The accused was neither licensed nor registered in any classes of plumbing work. He was fined $5000 and ordered to pay costs of $1133. No conviction was recorded.

ENDS

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