



## Time to get tough on kitchen ventilation

The reclassification of kitchen extract systems could result in more robust cleaning and maintenance procedures that would better protect those at the culinary coal face, writes Paul Downing, technical consultant for the Building Engineering Services Association (BESA).



**itchen extract ventilation should be re-classified as 'Local Exhaust Ventilation' (LEV) to protect catering staff from growing threats to their health, according to the Building Engineering Services Association (BESA).**

An increase in deadly carbon monoxide fumes from solid fuel cookers, barbecues and pizza ovens is putting commercial kitchen staff at risk and the new fashion for placing layers of 'volcanic rock' on top of traditional gas grills is creating a new source of harmful emissions, including greatly increasing the amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) detected in the air.

Re-classifying kitchen extract systems as LEVs would mean they were subject to more stringent regulation and inspection, leading to more regular cleaning and maintenance to improve their ability to remove

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harmful breathable fumes and organic compounds from the air.

There are almost 13,000 deaths each year from occupational lung disease and cancer caused by past exposure to chemicals and dust at work, according to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

The ventilation hygiene industry's current best practice guidance already recommends that kitchen extract systems are regularly checked and cleaned, but commercial kitchen owners and operators would face greater scrutiny and legal pressure if their systems were re-classified to fall in line with other industrial processes like factories,

welding shops, spray paint booths and woodworking facilities.

The HSE service and retail control guidance sheet SR27 'Controlling Cooking Fumes' recommends that kitchen extract systems are thoroughly examined and tested at least every 14 months by a "competent ventilation engineer" to comply with COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) regulations.

"Engineering control (local exhaust ventilation) is the recommended approach", adds SR27, which includes the statement that "some substances in cooking fumes can cause cancer".

This requirement is also stated in the HSE's guidance HSG54, which covers the maintenance, examination and testing of LEVs. And the HSE recommends that regular cleaning is carried out in line with best practice outlined in BESA guidance documents TR/19 and DW172.

Currently 45,000 systems are classified as LEVs across the UK, but BESA points out there are more than 500,000 commercial catering establishments — all of which should have some form of grease extract ventilation playing a key role in protecting workers' health and reducing the risk of fire.

Many of these kitchens are now, effectively, cooking with solid fuel because they place charcoal on top of their gas-fired cookers in order to produce the increasingly fashionable chargrill flavour. As a result, cooks and other kitchen workers are being exposed to potentially high levels of carbon-mon-

oxide and other airborne particulates harmful to health.

While industry best practice already highlights the importance of cleaning and maintaining these systems so they continue to work effectively, re-classifying them as LEVs would send a powerful message about their crucial health and safety role as well as subjecting their owners to much closer scrutiny and inspection.

There is no grey area with LEVs. It is the law that these are tested every 14 months and this could be transformational for ventilation hygiene. Employers have a duty of care — clearly stated under the COSHH regulations — to any staff exposed to cooking fumes, which could be carcinogenic.

The HSE states that there should be five to 10 air changes per hour in cooking areas and, as well as testing and maintaining the systems, properly-qualified contractors should check to make sure the ventilation system as a whole is working properly and measure the quality of the make-up air used to ventilate the space.

The HSE has considerable powers to prosecute business owners that either do not install a suitable LEV in their place of work or do not maintain it properly. Almost 14,000 'enforcement notices' were issued and 551 cases prosecuted by the HSE across England and Wales in 2013/2014 for inadequate ventilation strategies.

BESA experts suggest these numbers are just the tip of a very large iceberg. There are thousands of commercial cooking premises that do not have a proper ventilation strategy in place and whose only means of diluting contaminated air is simply to open a window. Workers in these kitchens are at just as much risk as those in premises already subject to HSE inspection and prosecution under LEV regulations. It's time to get tough on kitchens. **FEJ**

*Paul Downing is a technical consultant for the Building Engineering Services Association (BESA), the UK's leading trade organisation for building engineering services contractors. [www.thebesa.com](http://www.thebesa.com)*

