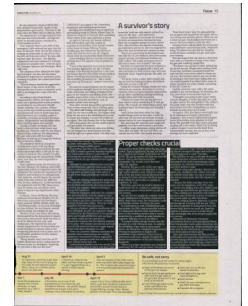


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Proper checks crucial

MALAYSIA has enough regulations to prevent gas leaks and explosions, The Institution of Engineers Malaysia (IEM) opines.

Its president Tan Yean Chin, however, says the IEM is ready to provide technical expertise and independent advice to authorities in reviewing the country's guidelines, regulations and standards, for gas installation and appliances.

Although in some condominiums and housing developments, piped-in natural gas (NG) from a central tank is used, most households use liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) which is usually from small, portable gas cylinders, he adds.

"There are existing standards for producing LPG cylinders. Cylinder connection outlets are standardised nationwide, allowing consumers to switch gas suppliers without needing to change the regulators.

"Pressure regulators and hoses for cylinders also have standards. And all suppliers must ensure consistent burning value, so there's no such thing as gas from a particular company burning cleaner than others. There are even guidelines for LPG tank placements."

Like gas cylinders, piped-in installations also have standards, he says. An engineer's design is reviewed by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) for tank and pipeline safety, while the Fire and Rescue Department ensures that fire-fighting features are in place. The Energy Commission and local council will assess the tank and supply layout in line with these standards, he adds.

There are, however, different standards for domestic and commercial gas for cooking appliances. Commercial cooking appliances need higher pressure tanks that are built for more robust, heavy duty use.

Condominium dwellers must be careful, Tan warns, advising them to check with their Joint

Management Body (JMB) before buying a gas cooker. Typical appliances, he says, are for LPG but a piped-in gas system could either be LPG or NG. The gas properties for both are very different. That is why they're not interchangeable. The nozzles aren't the same either, he explains.

Whether the gas is LPG or NG, our regulations require the gas to be odourised. A 'rotten egg' smell indicates a leak. If there's a smell, turn off the gas source and all electrical devices. Doing the latter prevents electrical sparks from setting the gas on fire or causing an explosion, he says.

Detecting a gas leak by smell is simple in a small home. But in a mall, it's a challenge as pipes are in spaces where there's usually no one around.

He says the Gas Supply Act requires domestic gas installations be checked, tested and certified, every three years. For restaurants, malls and hawker centres, it's every two years.

In condominiums with centralised gas piping systems, the JMB must ensure this is done. In commercial kitchens with centralised systems, it's the building owner's duty to ensure inspection by a qualified gas pipe installer or engineer. Failing to do so is an offence.

"A proper building design would route the gas pipe in a well-ventilated area. To address the possibility of gas leaks in unoccupied spaces, the Malaysian Standards Department is revising its regulations to require the installation of gas detectors. Food courts in prominent malls have already installed the devices in anticipation of the new Malaysian standards.

"There are ample regulations and standards governing LPG, NG and gas stoves. The risk of fire and explosion of gas cylinders and gas piping can be managed if proper and well-maintained equipment is used," Tan feels.

The problem, he says, is the lack of maintenance. Inspection of tanks is left to consumers. Stressing on the need to promote gas safety awareness, he reminds consumers to make sure their kitchen is safe:

- > Before using a gas cylinder, check its condition. Pay attention to the rubber seal inside the cylinder head (after the cap is removed). The seal prevents leaks after the regulator is inserted.

- > Replace the hoses and clips every two years, and the regulators, every five years.

- > Avoid over boiling from pots. Spilled soup/gravy can get into/block the gas flame holes.

- > The cooking area should be well-ventilated but don't place it directly in front of windows/fans as the wind can blow the flame.

- > If the cooking flame is yellowish, it means not enough air is mixing with the gas. When the flame looks like it's being blown from the burner hole, there's too much air. Read the appliance manual on how to make the air adjustments/get help from the gas supply delivery person.

Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) secretary-general Datuk Paul Selvaraj also wants safety awareness education to be ramped up. While checking for gas leaks may be too technical for consumers, they must know about product safety.

Sirim QAS International Sdn Bhd product certification and inspection department senior general manager Basori Selamat says the body can perform tests and certify gas cookers but it cannot mandate products for compulsory testing and certification.