

Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade
Stephen Robertson
8 July 2009

FRIDGE DANGERS SPARK SAFETY WARNING

Campers and holiday makers are being warned of the dangers of the incorrect use of portable gas fridges and other portable outdoor appliances.

Mines and Energy Minister Stephen Robertson said "Portable gas fridges could be dangerous if they were used in confined spaces".

"Tents, vehicles and caravans with no ventilation are danger zones for portable gas fridges," Mr Robertson said.

Minister Robertson said "The Petroleum and Gas Inspectorate has issued a Safety Alert urging campers and holiday-makers to read the warning signs on appliances before use:".

"The warning applies to portable gas refrigerators, as well as gas barbecues and portable gas heaters," he said.

Sadly, over the last couple of years there has been two fatalities. One near Tully in 2007, and the second a few months ago near Allora. The cause of death in each case resulted from carbon monoxide poisoning.

In both instances, a gas powered outdoor portable refrigerator was used in an enclosed vehicle (one being a station wagon, the other a fully enclosed van with minimal ventilation).

After the incident near Tully, the Petroleum and Gas Inspectorate issued a direction that required suppliers to fit additional safety warnings with greater visibility on portable gas fridges.

"The fridges are very convenient but people should be more aware of the risks of operating them outside their intended use or specifications," Mr Robertson said.

Many portable fridge units use three-way operating systems (12 volt, 240 volt and LPG) and look like eskies.

The point of difference is that portable fridges are not intended for use in confined spaces because they can generate high concentrations of carbon monoxide gas.

The gas, combustion-driven refrigeration process can use up the oxygen in a confined space leading to lethal quantities of carbon monoxide in that space.

Carbon monoxide is colourless, odourless and can result in death when inhaled in relatively small concentrations.

People don't realise that use of such portable appliances in enclosed spaces such as vehicles, motor homes, caravans, marine vessels and tents can lead to these tragedies.

Minister Robertson said “Householders need to be aware of the fact that outdoor appliances are strictly for use outdoors. Inappropriate use can seriously compromise safety”.