

The complaint

Mrs M is unhappy with the service she was provided by British Gas Services Limited when they carried out an annual service on her boiler – which is covered by her insurance policy.

Mrs M is being represented in her complaint by Mr M.

What happened

In March 2019 British Gas carried out an annual service on Mrs M's boiler. Around five weeks later, Mr M said the boiler failed to ignite. A British Gas engineer said the gas valve had failed and needed replacing.

They replaced the valve the next day but when carrying out tests on the boiler they found the emissions readings were high. The engineer discovered the flue was in a poor condition and needed replacing – which they did the next day. Mr M says he was told by the engineer they thought the problem with the flue had existed for some time – and if properly carried out, an emissions test would have shown raised CO levels.

Mr M raised a complaint. He felt the engineer should have noticed the issues with the flue and the high emissions during the annual service.

British Gas said due to the age of the boiler it was likely the flue was faulty, and beginning to deteriorate, at the time of the service. But as the emissions readings were within a normal range when the service was carried out, there would have been no reason for the first engineer to suspect there was a fault with the flue - so they wouldn't have been required to check it.

British Gas said it was likely the flue developed a hole after the service. This would have led to the issue with the faulty gas valve and increased emissions which meant the second engineer could identify the issue with the flue and replace it.

They commented the second engineer shouldn't have said the fault should've been identified during the service. To say sorry for the inconvenience and stress caused by the engineer's comments they offered Mrs M £30.

Mr M was unhappy the damage to the flue wasn't noticed during the annual service and

thinks it's unlikely the damage happened after, so he brought the complaint to our service. He also provided some information given by friend - a retired engineer.

Our Investigator didn't recommend we uphold Mrs M's complaint. He said as British Gas carried out inspections on the boiler, he felt more persuaded by their opinion and he was satisfied the annual service had been carried out as it should have. Our Investigator did agree that British Gas' engineer shouldn't have worried Mr M by telling them the readings would have been high at the time of the service. But as the replacement flue was fitted the next day, he felt British Gas' offer of £30 was fair.

Mr M didn't agree with our Investigator. He didn't think the readings taken at the time of the service were genuine and the test wasn't carried out properly. He said the second engineer was the only person who had dismantled the boiler and carried out a more thorough inspection – so would've been best informed. He said if everything was functioning normally the high emissions shouldn't have occurred, the fact it did pointed to another issue - the defective flue.

The complaint has now passed to me.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

Mr M has made a number of detailed points. I want to reassure Mr M that I've considered all of them, but I'm going to focus my decision on what I see as the central issues to this complaint. I don't intend this as a discourtesy, rather it reflects the informal nature of our service and my role in it.

I'm not upholding Mrs M's complaint. I know this will be disappointing, but I'll explain why. To avoid any doubt, I can confirm I have considered the evidence Mr M provided from his friend, but as the British Gas engineers have carried out inspections of the boiler, I think they're the most reliable opinion of what's likely to have happened at the time. So, I'll be focusing on what they've said in my decision.

Mrs P's policy says the annual service *will include testing the gases the appliance or boiler produces*. It also says '*...If the visit shows that it's necessary to take your appliance or boiler apart to adjust or clean it, we'll do so.*'

The first engineer carried out the service and the emissions test reported normal levels. British Gas' safety assurance team also confirmed the levels on the report were normal. As the levels were normal it's reasonable the engineer didn't think it was necessary to take the boiler apart – so they didn't.

Mr M said he didn't think the readings taken at the time of the service were genuine and the test wasn't carried out properly. He said the second engineer said the test would've shown raised emissions levels if properly carried out. But I've not seen anything that persuades me it wasn't carried out properly.

Mr M said the second engineer mentioned the issue had perhaps existed, to a lesser degree, when the boiler was serviced – and British Gas said it was likely the flue was beginning to deteriorate at the time. They said a hole developed which would have led to the increase of the emissions, allowing the second engineer to identify the issue.

The emissions reported at the time of the service were normal. And considering the length of time between the service, the issues arising around five weeks later, and the age of the boiler (over 20 years old), I don't think what British Gas said is unreasonable. So, I'm persuaded by what they have said.

The first engineer's emissions readings were normal, so I don't think there was anything to suggest they should have carried out further work. And I'm satisfied it's more likely than not the issue with the flue and the increase in emissions is something that happened after the service. So, I don't think British Gas have done anything wrong here.

British Gas has offered Mrs M £30 compensation for the worry their engineer's comments may have caused. I think this is a fair amount, so I won't be asking British Gas to make any further payment.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold Mrs M's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs M to accept or reject my decision before 24 April 2020.

Michael Baronti
Ombudsman