

The complaint

Mr B has complained that British Gas Services Limited (BG), when servicing his boiler, increased the operating temperature and as a consequence Mr B was caused extra costs.

What happened

Mr B has explained that when BG's engineers carried out annual services on his boiler on 21 June 2022 and 15 June 2023, the heat setting was left at 70 degrees. It had previously been at 55 degrees.

Mr B says that his heating system is a solid fuel bio-mass hybrid system where gas is used as an auxiliary heat source. He says this increase in the operating temperature caused a "vast" increase in gas consumption and the unnecessary burning of £400 worth of kiln dried hardwood over a two-year period. He also says that the boiler sustained excess use which has caused it to suffer additional wear.

Mr B says he wasn't told by the engineers that this change had been made to his system and had he been told he could have made an informed decision about the temperature setting in what is an auxiliary system. He has also observed that BG's recommendation is now not to increase temperatures beyond 55 degrees to save gas consumption. Since noticing the high temperature setting in August 2023 and adjusting it down to a level appropriate for his type of heating system, his gas consumption had reduced "dramatically".

Mr B wants BG to provide a rebate of 50% of his gas consumption since the service visit in 2022 and a rebate of the increased electricity usage over the same period. He also wants BG to make a goodwill gesture in relation to the increased wear on his boiler by overuse.

In its final response to Mr B's complaint, BG says there is no evidence that its engineers left his boiler at the higher temperature said that any excess energy usage would be "minimal". It explained that an engineer may increase the temperature during a service visit to an average of 70 degrees to avoid any risk of legionella in the hot water cylinder not being killed off. It advised that at any further appointments Mr B should make the engineer aware that the temperature should be left lower.

BG has also stated that its National Technical Support team had advised that *"the boiler stat control on the front of the boiler is a 'Customer control' and is there for a customer to set to their preferred preference or property requirement throughout the year and adjusted, as necessary. ...Mr B could have changed this at any point"*

As Mr B wasn't satisfied with BG's final response to his complaint, he brought it to this service. Our investigator's view was that there was no evidence that BG's engineers had set and maintained the temperature of Mr B's boiler at 70 degrees and that the higher temperature was necessary to ensure that it dealt with bacteria in the hot water cylinder. She didn't consider that BG was responsible for Mr B's increased bills, which BG had said should only be minimally higher as a consequence.

In response to our investigator's view, Mr B provided evidence of the fact that his gas meter readings were significantly higher until he noticed in August 2023 that the gas boiler temperature was set at 70 degrees following which, after adjustment, they dropped markedly. He asked that his complaint be referred to an ombudsman for a final decision.

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.

Having done so, I'm not upholding Mr B's complaint and I'll explain why not.

From the information that Mr B has provided, I'm satisfied that his gas bill increased significantly during the period from June 2022, when the first engineer increased the operating temperature of his gas boiler to 70 degrees, to August 2023 when Mr B noticed that the operating temperature was set at that level. I therefore consider it reasonable to conclude that this increase in the boiler temperature, attributable to BG, was the cause of the increase in Mr B's gas usage and so his bills.

BG doesn't deny that its engineers set and maintained the boiler's operating temperature at 70 degrees or thereabouts from June 2022 and it's provided a reason why they would have done this. Mr B maintains that there was no need to have increased the operating temperature as the water in his storage tank was being heated by another source. His gas boiler was a secondary system which he says he could dispense with. He believes that BG's engineers weren't familiar with hybrid heating systems.

Mr B says he wasn't told by BG's engineers that the boiler's temperature had been set at 70 degrees, and BG doesn't argue that he was. I accept Mr B's point that had he been told, he could've made an informed decision to reduce the temperature back to the 55 degrees which he says is the operating temperature recommended by the installers of his heating system. His gas usage and gas bills would not then have increased.

But Mr B didn't notice until August 2023, some 14 months after the temperature was increased, that the boiler was set at 70 degrees. In my view, the length of this delay is not BG's fault. Mr B had the opportunity to check either his boiler's temperature setting or his gas bills at any time after June 2022, either of which would have alerted him to the need to lower the operating temperature.

My conclusion is therefore that it would not be fair or reasonable for me to require BG to make a reimbursement to Mr B or to compensate him for additional wear when the additional gas usage over some 14 months was something that Mr B could've avoided if he had checked that the temperature was set at his preferred temperature.

My final decision

For the reasons I've given above, I'm not upholding Mr B's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 10 July 2024.

Nigel Bremner
Ombudsman