

complaint

Mr T's complaint is that British Gas Insurance Limited damaged the gas pipe to his cooker and subsequently caused an explosion in his home.

background

In March 2012, an engineer attended Mr T's property to carry out a repair to the toilet. In order to complete the repair, the engineer turned off the water supply at the stop cock located behind the gas cooker. In order to access the stop cock, the engineer had to pull the oven away from the wall.

Three days after the engineer had attended, Mr T contacted British Gas as an explosion had occurred at his property; National Grid had attended and found that the cause had been a gas leak from the gas pipe for the cooker.

Mr T says that the damage to the gas pipe was caused by the engineer when he moved the cooker to access the water stop cock. He therefore wants compensation for the distress caused to his family as a result.

A British Gas engineer attended the same day and replaced the gas pipe to the cooker and diagnosed that some parts that had been damaged by fire were also needed. The replacement parts were fitted a few days later. However, British Gas does not accept that the tear in the gas pipe (which caused the gas leak) was caused by its engineer. It says that the tear was more likely to have been caused by the cooker being moved on several occasions.

British Gas said that its engineers are aware not to put tension on gas hoses as they know that it can cause pipes to tear. It also said that Mr T told its engineer that the cooker was occasionally moved in order to clean behind it.

Mr T does not accept this. He says that the cooker had not been moved between British Gas' first attendance and the explosion, and does not get moved at all.

Our adjudicator did not recommend that Mr T's complaint should be upheld as he did not consider that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the accident was caused by the work carried out by British Gas.

Mr T disagreed with the findings and requested an ombudsman's decision. Therefore the matter has been referred to me.

my findings

I have considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

I understand that the explosion happened while Mr T and his wife were looking after their two grandchildren at their home and I have no doubt this would have been a frightening experience for them all. Fortunately it was dealt with quickly by the fire brigade. And Mr T says he was able to have the damage repaired before British Gas reattended.

Mr T has said that the engineer that attended in March 2012 was not qualified to work on gas appliances and therefore should not have moved the cooker.

The engineer moved the cooker in order to access the mains water stop cock and was not undertaking work on the cooker. I am not aware of any regulations or other independent evidence to suggest that he should not have done so.

British Gas' engineer moved the cooker only three days prior to the incident and essentially Mr T feels that this is more than coincidence and that he must have caused the tear in the gas pipe.

However, as far as I am aware, there is no independent expert evidence to support this. In order to be satisfied that British Gas' engineer caused the damage to the pipe, I would need to be satisfied that there are no other likely causes.

While I have no reason to doubt what Mr T has said – that the cooker has not been moved before this occasion – I am not certain that there could not be any other cause. Mr T clearly feels that the proximity in time between British Gas' visit and the explosion is significant. However, an alternative interpretation could be that if the engineer had damaged the pipe during that visit, it would not have taken three days for a gas leak to be apparent. There is simply no convincing evidence either way.

There is insufficient evidence, in my opinion, for me to determine with any certainty that the engineer caused the tear in the pipe which resulted in the gas explosion.

my final decision

For these reasons, I do not feel able to uphold Mr T's complaint, and I make no award against British Gas Insurance Limited.

Harriet McCarthy
ombudsman