Industry must rethink recovery process

TECHNICIANS MAY NOT be aware of how quickly non-flammable refrigerant can become flammable during the recovery process. With the refrigerant landscape changing so quickly Refrigerant Reclalm Australia (RRA) is looking at ways to manage this new environment.

RRA general manager, Kylie Farrelley, said the HVACR industry has to understand the risks associated with flammable mixes because what goes into a system may not be what is returned for destruction at end of life.

"The challenge we face is not knowing at what ratios and blends a mix becomes flammable at end of life, there is no software app to calculate this yet," she said.

Farrelley said work practices need to change immediately and this needs to be accompanied by a widespread education campaign.

"As we progress through the HFC phase down many refrigerants will ultimately be flammable," she said.

"We know flammables are coming through the supply chain now and the problem is going to increase rapidly.

"As an industry we need to rethink how unwanted gas is handled, stored and destroyed.

RRA recommends using a gas analyser to identify what's left in the system, especially when using a blend that starts with a four or a five.

In future wholesalers will provide a non-flammable recovery cylinder and a flammable recovery cylinder.

"My advice is to stay informed because this landscape is changing quickly," Farrelley said.

Time to act on training, education

REFRIGERANT AUSTRALIA EXECUTIVE director, Greg Picker, said the HVACR industry needs to do more to ensure everyone understands the risks and challenges associated with flammables.

He said this is important for the industry to operate safely.

"The big issue now that needs to be addressed is training. This is essential because we need to know that the people dealing with flammable refrigerants are competent," he said.

"This is a challenge because we don't have laws specifically related to flammable refrigerants and safety.

"The Australian Refrigeration Council (ARC) look after licensing on the environmental side but we need to do more."

In addition to training Picker said there needs to be greater awareness of the risks.

He said licensing needs to be backed up with more information.

Another speaker at CCN Live was Sally North, director of WorkSafe Service Industries and Specialists Directorate in the West Australian Department of Mines, Industry and Safety.

North has been working in the area of workplace safety for many years and first became familiar with refrigerants in 2008.

She coordinated the development of a national workplace and safety position paper on flammable refrigerants produced by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) across Australia.

The focus of North's presentation was workplace safety, she shared her own experiences of identifying refrigerant hazards when developing the position paper.

"There were concerns about compatibility between refrigerant and system, as well as compliance because training is not a licensed area at this stage," North said.

"There have been recent amendments to the W/H&S Act in Western Australia that are not specific to flammables but the laws are now similar to the other states so there is better alignment.

"All the states are now aligned in the area of workplace health and safety with the exception of Victoria."

North said it will make it easier for anyone working in multiple jurisdictions and it should be in place in 2021.