

## **DIRECTOR'S BLOG 2010**

### **DIRECTOR'S BLOG: MARCH 2010**

#### **Celebrate Plumbing on World Plumbing Day**

There are days to commemorate or highlight all sorts of events or issues. 11 March 2010 will see the creation of another day on the calendar of world events- the first ever World Plumbing Day.

An initiative of the World Plumbing Council, World Plumbing Day seeks to raise world awareness of the significant contribution which the plumbing industry makes to health and the environment.

Writing in the late 1800s, Scottish inventor of the Buchan trap, William Paton Buchan, wrote about a good plumber being "a benefactor of humanity" and predicted that in time plumbers would be seen as being important as medical doctors. Is that the comparison which many people in the UK would make today? Probably not- but the truth remains that without good plumbing, public health in this country would be seriously worse than it currently is. In developing countries, the situation is even worse with millions of people dying each year simply because they do not have access to safe water and sanitation (the bread and butter of the plumbing industry).

With the whole world focussing on climate change and the depletion of natural resources, it is again the plumbing industry which is playing a major role in the design, installation and maintenance of energy and water efficiency products and increasingly renewable technologies like solar, ground and air source heating and biomass boilers.

Working with the theme, "Plumbing-Vital to Global Health", it is hoped that on this first World Plumbing Day many people in many countries will have their attention drawn to the fact that plumbing is important.

I will be in Beijing, China on World Plumbing Day 2010 holding a press conference and speaking at a special Technical Forum which has been arranged for the Day. Here in Scotland there will be events in the Scottish Parliament (where a motion has already been lodged marking the Day) and in Buchanan Street, Glasgow. Curious about that one? If you can, go to Buchanan Street between 1100 and 1300 on 11 March and find out! There will also be events in places including USA, Australia and India as plumbing organisations seek to use the Day to tell people about our industry.

Join with us in celebrating World Plumbing Day on 11 March 2010 and get the message across about plumbing!

## DIRECTOR'S BLOG 2010

### DIRECTOR'S BLOG- FEBRUARY 2010

#### The Boiler Scrappage Scheme Saga

The early December 2009 announcement of a Boiler Scrappage Scheme caused great excitement in industry, consumer and environmental circles. Following the UK Government's scheme to encourage the replacement of old cars (a welcome boost to an ailing car industry) an incentive to encourage the replacement of old, expensive to run and environmentally unfriendly central heating boilers is a great idea. It can benefit consumers, the environment and an industry which has suffered badly in the recession.

However, things were not as straightforward as they looked. It became apparent after a few days that the announcement by the **UK** Chancellor of the Exchequer only applied in England. The reaction from the UK's other three countries was predictably loud and sustained.

SNIFE was at the forefront of the Scottish and Northern Irish cries and letters and emails were sent to a range of Ministers and officials. The responses were disappointing in that no one seemed willing to make a quick decision. At the same time, public awareness became enormous across the entire UK. During one week the most accessed story on AOL was about "boiler scrappage scheme". How unusual for a plumbing industry story to nudge Brad, Angelina, Jordan and Co. out of the limelight!

The Scottish Parliament operates a Public Petitions system where anyone can raise an issue with the Parliament. This has previously resulted in changes in the law. For example, the requirement to fit thermostatic mixing valves came from a Public Petition. Part of the process can include a facility under which the Parliament website hosts an e-petition allowing people to express their support for the issue. SNIFE decided to follow this route as a way of showing our politicians that this would be a popular measure and we prepared a petition to go on the e-petition site. Although it took 3 weeks from submission to appearing on the site, within minutes of it being posted there, the signatures began to be added with some 300 people supporting the idea within the first few days.

Politics can be unpredictable. (Is that a gross understatement?). It came as a (pleasant) surprise to wake up on the morning of the Scottish Budget debate (3 February 2010) to learn that the Finance Minister had, overnight, added £2m for a Scottish Boiler Scrappage Scheme to his package of proposals. Although this was by no means the most important issue in the package, it did feature in the Parliament debate and we were pleased, just after 5pm, to see the Budget being passed which means that there **will be** a Scottish Boiler Scrappage Scheme.

As is often said, the devil will be in the detail. £2m is a very small amount of funding (proportionately much less than being spent in England) and will have to be spent wisely. SNIFE has offered advice and assistance to officials as the scheme is developed and we hope to see our suggestions being taken on board.

## DIRECTOR'S BLOG 2010

### DIRECTOR'S BLOG: JANUARY 2010

#### A chilly start to 2010- will things warm up?

Plumbers were in high demand in many parts of the country in the first weeks of this New Year dealing with the aftermath of the worst winter weather which we have seen in 30 years. Media attention was high and a number of SNIFE members were interviewed on national television either giving advice to customers or explaining just how busy they had been over the Festive Season. One member in Kingussie had only managed a couple of hours away from work over a whole week to have his Christmas Dinner.

While some people might see repairing frost bursts as “manna from heaven” for the plumbing industry, I am sure that most plumbers would prefer not to have these short bursts of pressurized activity- often working in difficult conditions at unsocial hours (and during holidays) for unknown customers (which can lead to payment problems). For that reason, SNIFE's focus before and during periods of exceptionally cold weather is as much about giving preventative advice as about encouraging customers who experience problems to ensure that they engage a SNIFE Licensed Plumbing Business.

Another downside of the cold snap was the transport difficulties which always arise when we have even a smattering of snow or ice. SNIFE received calls from members who had employees unable to get to work as their roads had not been gritted and public transport was either cancelled or sporadic. I know that colleagues in countries with much more severe winters don't seem to have these problems.

After the thaw, a couple of published reports painted a pretty gloomy picture of recent and future construction industry activity. On the one hand, the Bank of England described construction as having been worse affected than any other sector of the UK economy in late 2009 “**by some margin**”. Not just a little bit worse then. Secondly, projections produced by the Construction Products Association are a mixed bag with many aspects of construction predicting that 2010 will not see a dramatic increase in workload. SNIFE members still report difficulties in getting any support from their banks so even where work is available, it is not always possible to finance it. That is a tragedy which will inevitably lead to problems in the months ahead.

In many years, Scotland and Northern Ireland don't experience bad winter weather until February. Is it too soon to think that we have seen the worst? Let us hope that better conditions are not far away- both in weather and workload terms.