

LPG regulations, bubble leak detectors and Boat Safety Scheme examiners

This information sheet explains the issues and options regarding gas regulations and BSS examiners for private boats.

Which of these are true for you?

“There is no gas system installed on my boat” You can use any BSS examiner

“There is a bubble leak detector in my gas locker/gas housing” You can use any BSS examiner

“No-one lives on the boat” You can use any BSS examiner

“Someone lives on the boat, it has gas installed, but no bubble leak detector” Check your options below

If any of the first three statements are true, you can go ahead and book any examiner.

If the last statement is true, you have basically two options:

Option 1: Select a BSS examiner who is also gas safe registered for LPG.

To do this, visit <https://www.boatsafetyscheme.org/requirements-examinations-certification/arranging-a-bss-examination/find-an-examiner/>

Type in or click on your area. This will bring up a list of examiners willing to work in your area.

As you select “**more**” for each examiner, you will see that some have an icon like this

There are currently eight of these willing to work into the London area.



Option 2: Get a bubble leak detector fitted

You can ask any LPG-qualified gas-safe engineer to do this – it doesn’t have to be an examiner.

If you don’t already know one, visit the gas safe register <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/>

Enter your area, then click on “Search”

Select the button for Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), then click on “Update results”.

When you have a bubble leak detector installed, you can choose any BSS examiner.

If you would like further information, there are answers to questions on the following pages.

Alternatively, contact me and I will be very happy to help.

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Questions and answers

What are the advantages of Option 1?

This option is probably cheaper and could be quicker than Option 2. No change to your boat is necessary.

What are the advantages of Option 2?

Sometimes it's hard to find a gas-safe registered examiner available in the time frame you want, and it can be easier to find an available gas-safe engineer to fit a bubble leak detector (BLD).

Once you have the BLD, the main advantages are

- a) You can check your own system for gas tightness whenever you like.
- b) You can use any BSS examiner for examinations.
- c) Some examiners (me included) charge a bit less if you have a BLD, as it makes it quicker and more straightforward to test your gas system tightness.

What counts as living on the boat?

Actually the official question we have to ask you is

“Is the boat used solely or primarily by anyone for domestic or residential purposes i.e. is the boat a houseboat, or is it used for cruising but in which the owner or user lives for most of the time?”

‘Most of the time’ should be interpreted as meaning more than half of the time.

Why does living on the boat make a difference?

If the boat is used solely or primarily for domestic or residential purposes, it comes under an area of UK law known as the Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations, abbreviated as GSIUR. These regulations forbid anyone who is not gas-safe registered from carrying out any gas work on the boat.

Without a bubble leak detector, examiners have to check for gas tightness by connecting a manometer (pressure gauge) to your system. This counts as work, so only gas-safe engineers are permitted to do it on boats that come under GSIUR.

Hire boats and boats where the public are invited on board for business purposes (e.g. floating cafés) also come under GSIUR.

Can I fit a bubble leak detector myself?

Fitting one is normally very straightforward, but it counts as work, so if your boat comes under GSIUR, only a gas-safe engineer would be allowed to fit a BLD.

How much does a BLD cost?

The device itself can be obtained for about £70 including VAT - for example see <https://www.gasproducts.co.uk/caravan-marine/marine-gas-leak-testers-bubble-etc.html>.

You would have to ask individual gas engineers regarding fitting cost for your particular boat.

Can a BLD be fitted anywhere in the system?

The BSS can only use it for gas tightness testing if the BLD is fitted in a gas locker or housing.

More questions and answers

Are there no other options to get my examination done?

There is one more. A non-gas-safe examiner could arrange for a gas-safe engineer to attend the examination to do a gas tightness test using a manometer. The examiner would observe the test being performed. In practice this option is rarely used, because of the likely increased cost and logistical challenge of arranging a time when both the examiner and gas-safe engineer are available.

Can any gas-safe engineer do the work for me?

Not all gas-safe engineers are qualified to work with LPG, the gas used on boats. For more information see <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/gas-safety/frequently-asked-questions/>

Can the BLD be fitted in series with the hose?

You should seek advice from your gas engineer about the fitting of a BLD.

For the BSS examination, hose is permitted for the connection between a cylinder-mounted regulator and a BLD, and also permitted for the connection between a BLD and the system pipework. Both hoses must be within the locker or housing, and each hose length must be 1 metre or less.

However the BLD is connected, it must be securely mounted in the locker or housing.

How does a BLD work?

Normally gas flows through the device and bypasses the path through the fluid. When the button on the device is pressed, all gas flow is diverted through the fluid, and can be observed as bubbles. In a perfect gas-tight system with all appliances off, there would be no bubbles observed.

No-one lives on my boat, it's just used for occasional private leisure purposes. Can you do a BSS examination for me?

Yes, any examiner can do the examination. If you don't have a BLD, there needs to be an accessible test point on your gas system – this is nearly always the case, particularly if you have had a BSS examination before. If in doubt, check with your examiner.

I don't use the gas anymore, so can it be ignored for the examination?

To pass a BSS examination, the gas system would need to be either complete and working, or fully decommissioned. There are strict requirements for a system to be considered decommissioned, so it's best to contact your examiner in advance rather than assume your gas system can be disregarded for the purpose of the examination.

The fluid in my BLD is brown. Can it still be used?

In order for an examiner to use a BLD for the gas tightness test, the fluid must be clear and the level between the two indicator lines on the chamber. Sometimes the top of the fluid is hard to see because it's exactly level with the top line – if that's the case, it's fine. If the fluid is discoloured it must be changed.

Why are some bubble leak detectors blue and others silver?

Modern Alde BLDs come in two versions according to the pipe / hose size to be fitted. The blue ones are for 8mm pipe or hose, the silver ones for 10mm. Your gas engineer should decide which you require. Older (pre 2008) BLDs made by Alde are always silver.