



Pressure systems - again

Sometimes it feels like it wouldn't be a proper SSERC Bulletin without an article on the Pressure Systems Safety Regulations (PSSR). Our recent article in Bulletin 259 and the follow-up advice in 261 caused a stooshie in some quarters. Indeed, there were a small number of people who felt that SSERC was insisting on examiners having to meet higher standards than those required by the Health and Safety Executive.

In November, representatives from SSERC, CLEAPSS, HSE and two pressure systems engineers met to discuss the proportionate application of the regulations in schools. HSE were unambiguous. The SSERC/CLEAPSS approach, as outlined in our Bulletins, was in line with their own thinking.

Another issue arose at this meeting when SSERC and CLEAPSS asked for clarification on a regulation that seemed to imply that a Written Scheme of Examination was required before a pressure system could be used, even though the scheme would not itself be used until a year had passed and the pressure cooker, steam engine or autoclave required to be examined. There were two scenarios we could think of that made this seem a bit, well, daft.

Scenario 1

A school decides not to get involved in this annual inspection malarkey and instead elects to buy a new pressure cooker every year, scrapping the old one rather than having it examined (this is not something endorsed by SSERC). Does the law mean that although they never intend to have it inspected they still have to get a WSE before they can use it?

Scenario 2

A school buys a thermostatically-controlled autoclave. Staff have read SSERC guidance and know that it cannot be inspected inhouse. Do they still need a WSE that nobody in the school will ever use before they can begin working with the autoclave?

Before you write to one of the rabidly anti-HSE newspapers, we must say that we understand why this regulation is in place. Firstly, some pressure systems are so complex they need to be inspected before use. Also, the WSE specifies the inspection frequency. How do you know when to inspect your equipment if you don't have a WSE?

HSE were pragmatic. The Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) for PSSR says that a WSE must be **prepared** before you use the pressure system. You do not actually have to be in possession of a copy and you do not have to test before use. It just has to exist somewhere. Based on this, we have the following advice regarding what should happen if you decide to buy a new steam engine, autoclave or pressure cooker.

- Contact us at SSERC and tell us exactly what you plan to buy.
- We will tell you whether or not we are aware of a WSE for this equipment.

If we are, you can buy the equipment and use it. Remember, at this time you do not have to have the WSE in your hand, you only need to know that there is one out there. We will tell you when to have the equipment inspected. This is likely to be a year after it has been supplied to you. Bulletin 259 will tell you what to do then.

If we are not aware of a WSE, you are going to have to source one yourself.

From SSERC's point of view, this helps us to help you avoid buying something unsuitable. We heard of a well-meaning technician who sought to save his school money by buying a cheap autoclave from America from an online vendor. The technician used his own credit card for the purchase. Sadly, when the autoclave arrived it was clear that it did not meet UK safety standards. Nobody was willing to reimburse the technician, who was left out-of-pocket.

We do not want to end on a downbeat note. Our recent meetings and discussions with HSE regarding PSSR have demonstrated that they are prepared to be pragmatic and proportionate when addressing safety issues in schools. Long may this continue. ◀