leading off

Starting the New Year with a Bang! (No Pun Intended...)

Shortly before the holidays, a couple of events transpired that are sure to have an impact in the HVACR industry in 2012. On Dec. 14, 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced they are adding three hydrocarbon refrigerants as acceptable alternatives in household and small commercial stand-alone refrigerators and freezers through their Significant New Alternatives Policy (SNAP) program.

According to the EPA's prepublication version of their final rule, "The three hydrocarbon refrigerants approved as acceptable substitutes, with use conditions, are propane, isobutane, and the blend R-441A."

Some of the use conditions include limiting HC refrigerant charge sizes to 57 grams for household appliances and 150 grams for commercial units, only allowing HCs in equipment specifically designed for them with ignition sources minimized (and no retrofitting allowed), and requiring significant amounts of warning and labeling to make service personnel aware that the system contains a potentially flammable gas in the refrigeration circuit.

Despite some "devil in the details" curiosities, the approval of these "new" natural refrigerants in a very few specific uses is a harbinger of things to come as the industry seeks to balance its overall environmental impact of the equipment produced with safety and energy efficiency. While Europe and Asia have been using HCs in domestic appliances for more than 10 years, several countries have gone further into allowing charge sizes up to 9 lb per circuit for some very innovative supermarket refrigeration applications.

That kind of system development definitely means service personnel will need to be trained more than ever on the details and safety aspects of working with these refrigerants.

The other December 2011 event that took place was NATE's achievement of ANSI Personnel Certification Accreditation. This accreditation covers the original Installation and Service "air side" certifications offered by NATE: a. Air Conditioning; b. Air Distribution; c. Air to Air Heat Pumps; d. Gas Furnaces; and e. Oil Furnaces.

With this accreditation, it is more likely than ever that more federal, state and municipal legislative and governing bodies, in addition to utility companies, will begin specifying HVACR technician certification that is ANSI accredited. Which in turn means you'll likely start hearing more and more demand for credentials such as NATE that demonstrate a level of competency.

Congratulations to NATE and Technical Committee, especially NATE Vice President of Certification Pat Murphy, CM, for tenaciously pursuing this outstanding recognition and further elevating the level of HVACR technician competency.

I hope to see you in Booth 4752 at the AHR Expo in Chicago at the end of the month, where we're all sure to learn about these and other significant progress in 2012 for the entire HVACR industry!

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