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For immediate release

Armidale's move to modern gas supply ramps up

Armidale's evolution to a modern day gas supply is gathering momentum as more TLP customers make their choice about a new energy supply. Responding to an increase in customers ready to make a decision, Kleenheat Gas' Mott Street branch will open on two Saturdays this month.

General Manager Graham Smith said Kleenheat was more than ready for an influx of customer requests, with 12 fully licensed gas fitters lined up to do conversions for TLP customers switching to LPG through the company.

Six of the gas fitters, all local operators, had agreed to make Kleenheat conversions their top priority while another six will dedicate regular time to the project if called on. At least another two from neighbouring towns are also on standby to assist.

"We have more than enough gas fitters to carry out conversions before the TLP shuts down," Mr Smith said.

"The only factor that customers need to worry about is making a decision about their energy supply options, and there's plenty of information and assistance through us and the Council about the types of supply to consider and assistance available through concessions and rebates."

"I also can't stress enough that we're here to talk through any concerns customers may have – be they financial, environmental or logistical – and will confidentially discuss arrangements to help the customer upgrade with minimal fuss."

Mr Smith said the majority of TLP customers who had already consulted Kleenheat had been pleasantly surprised at how little it had cost them to switch to an up-to-date supply with new appliances – in some cases at no cost at all.

"There's no one-size-fits-all solution for every customer, which is why we're dealing with each individually to assess their needs and circumstances," he said.

"The important thing is to contact us so we can discuss their particular situation rather than assume they'll be up for a huge expense. We had a lady come in recently who'd been on the radio that morning saying how worried she was about the cost – then came to us that afternoon and walked out with a conversion and \$1400 appliance organised at a grand total of \$80."

"The point I'm making is that unless customers contact us directly to go through their options and entitlements, they could be missing out on a golden opportunity to upgrade their supply and appliances while a raft of incentives are available to them."

Mr Smith said around 180 TLP customers had chosen to convert to LPG with Kleenheat so far, while 18 had switched to electricity and just two had gone to competitors.

“Most have contacted us and taken some time to weigh up their options,” he said. “The take up rate was a bit slow at first while people considered their options and shopped around, but there’s a notable increase in the number coming back to us now with a decision.”

Mr Smith said word-of-mouth from customers who’d already converted and were really happy with the results was one reason why numbers were picking up now. However, around 100 customers are yet to respond to their letters, with landlords being the most difficult to reach.

“Making contact with the owners of rental properties is tricky because we can’t legally access their details,” Mr Smith said. “Thanks to the cooperation of real estate agents and tenants, we’ve been able to get in touch with most, but there are still a couple we’re yet to locate.”

With two months to go before the scheduled shutdown ahead of winter, Mr Smith urged customers to get whatever information they needed to make an informed decision.

Mr Smith added that while Kleenheat had provided a range of customer recommendations after reviewing all properties connected to the TLP system, customers could ask for a site visit if they wanted their property reassessed.

“As I’ve said before, our decision to decommission the TLP system wasn’t taken lightly,” he said. “The Armidale community has known it was on the cards since August last year when the local paper ran a front page article about our latest review – and it’s been discussed before in the past.”

“Knowing the system couldn’t last forever and particularly when TLP appliances stopped being manufactured over 10 years ago, we’ve periodically looked at potential solutions including expanding the SNG network.”

“We appreciate some residential customers want to hook up to the SNG, but with further and more recent assessment it’s not practical or viable for us to offer that option anymore.”

“At the end of the day, the longer we leave shutting down the TLP system, the worse and more costly it becomes - especially under winter conditions. The time to move Armidale to a modern system is now and we’re doing everything we can to support our customers through that transition.”

Kleenheat is currently sending follow up letters to Armidale customers still making a decision, as well as phone calls and property visits. In addition to weekdays, customers can visit the Armidale branch in Mott Street from 9am to 1pm on Saturday’s 19 and 26 March.

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