

VENTILATION OF DOMESTIC NATURAL GAS APPLIANCES

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Definitions of terms specific to ventilation (printed in **bold type** on their first main appearance) are given on page 20.

Contents

3	Why ventilation is important
	References
	Unsafe Situations categories
4	Gas appliance categories
	Category A – Flue
	Category B – Open flue
	Category C – Room sealed
5	Heat input
	Converting to net heat input (kW) – examples
6	Air vents for gas appliances
	Measuring an air vent
	Vents with angled louvres
7	Terracotta air bricks
	Intumescent air vents
8	Ventilation of open flue appliances
	Adventitious air
	Decorative Fuel Effect (DFE) appliances
9	Worked examples
10	Ventilation of flueless appliances
11	Worked examples
12	Open flue and flueless ventilation – summary of differences
13	Ventilation flowchart for a room containing a single appliance
14	Ventilation of rooms containing more than one appliance
	Worked examples
16	Compartment ventilation
17	Worked examples
18	Balanced compartments
19	Indirect ventilation
	Worked example
20	Glossary

Why ventilation is important

When natural gas undergoes **complete combustion** the only **products of combustion (POC)** are **carbon dioxide** and water vapour. The volume of **combustion air** needed to achieve complete combustion is approximately ten times the volume of gas being burned. In other words, the minimum **air : gas ratio** needed to achieve complete combustion is 10 : 1.

Lack of clean air causes **incomplete combustion**, where the poisonous gas **carbon monoxide** is produced together with **soot**.

In addition to providing combustion air, ventilation is also needed for appliance cooling, human comfort, dilution of flueless appliance emissions and to provide motive force for chimneys including the operation of **downdraught diverters**.

References

BS 5440-2:2009 Flueing and ventilation for gas appliances of rated input not exceeding 70 kW net (1st, 2nd and 3rd family gases). Specification for the installation and maintenance of ventilation provision for gas appliances

BS 5871-3:2005 Specification for the installation and maintenance of gas fires, convector heaters, fire / back boilers and decorative fuel effect gas appliances

The Building Regulations Part J (Heat Producing Appliances) 2010 and Approved Document J (reprinted 2015)

IGEM/G/11 The Gas Industry Unsafe Situations Procedure

BS 5250:2011+A1:2016 Code of practice for control of condensation in buildings

Unsafe Situations categories

According to IGEM/G/11 a gas appliance is deemed **At Risk (AR)** if:

- the air vent supplying it is less than 90 % of the required size, or:
- the air vent supplying it is unsuitable (closable, fitted with a fly-screen etc.), or:
- no air vent is fitted where one is required, or:
- the room volume is smaller than manufacturer's instructions or standards permit

More than one related AR fault can be upgraded to **Immediately Dangerous (ID)**.

Spillage of products of combustion into a room or internal space from a flued appliance is ID.

Gas appliance categories

There are three 'flue categories' or 'flue types' of gas appliance, known as A, B and C. Their differences arise from their source of combustion air and where they release products of combustion (POC).

Category A – Flueless appliances

- Take combustion air from the room
- Release POC into the room
- Need a source of ventilation in the room



Flueless cooker



Flueless fire

Category B – Open flue appliances

- Take combustion air from the room
- Release POC outside via flue or chimney
- Need a source of ventilation in the room



Open flue fire



Open flue boiler

Category C – Room sealed appliances

- Take combustion air from outside via air intake
- Release POC outside via flue
- Do not need a source of ventilation in the room
- May need cooling ventilation in compartments



Room sealed boiler



Flue terminal and air intake

Heat input

Heat input is effectively a measure of how much gas an appliance burns in a given time. For certain appliances it can be used to calculate the size of air vent needed. All ventilation calculations in these notes are based on **net** (sometimes spelled 'nett') heat input measured in **kilowatts (kW)**.

*Note: do not use **heat output** for ventilation calculations. Heat output is a measure of the useful heat produced by an appliance, not of the amount of gas it consumes.*

Heat input is usually given on the appliance data badge and in manufacturer's instructions (MI).

Older appliance MI may specify **gross** heat input in kW or British Thermal Units per hour (BTU / h). In some cases, appliance **gas rate** may be known instead of heat input. The table below can be used to convert these to kW (net):

Unit of measurement	Conversion to kW (net)
kW (gross heat input)	÷ 1.1
BTU / h (gross heat input)	÷ 3787
m ³ / h (gas rate)	× 9.5
ft ³ / h (gas rate)	× 0.27

Conversion to net heat input (kW)

Converting to net heat input (kW) – examples

1. *The data badge of a 1980s open flue boiler states its heat input as 24 kW*

The appliance is old and the data badge does not specify 'net' so we may assume that the given heat input is gross.

$$\text{Net heat input} = 24 \div 1.1 = 21.8 \text{ kW}$$

2. *The MI for an open flue water heater specifies its heat input as 33,000 BTU / h*

$$\text{Net heat input} = 33000 \div 3787 = 8.7 \text{ kW}$$

3. *The gas rate of an appliance is measured at 2.61 cubic metres per hour (m³ / h)*

$$\text{Net heat input} = 2.61 \times 9.5 = 24.8 \text{ kW}$$

Air vents for gas appliances

Where purpose-provided ventilation is required, it shall be provided by air vents which:

- are rigid
- are not closable
- do not have a fly-screen
- do not have openings narrower than 5 mm

To prevent the entry of pests, vents to outside should have openings no wider than 10 mm.

Measuring an air vent

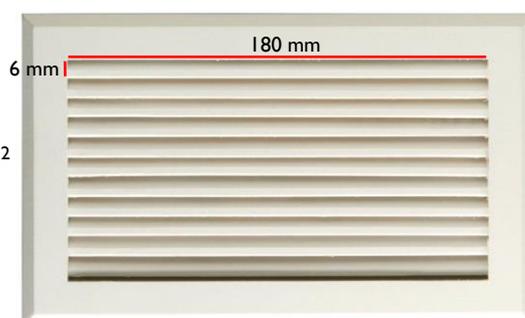
The **free area** (or 'free air') of an air vent is the total area of the holes open to the air source. Modern vents are usually marked with their free area in square centimetres (cm²).

Free area can be measured as follows:

$$\text{Each hole} = 180 \text{ mm} \times 6 \text{ mm} = 1080 \text{ mm}^2$$

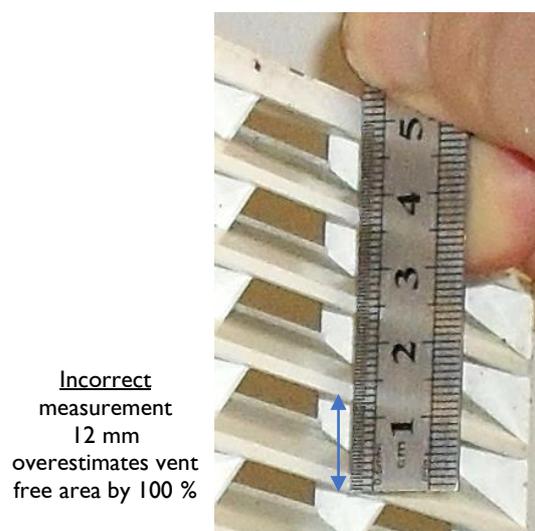
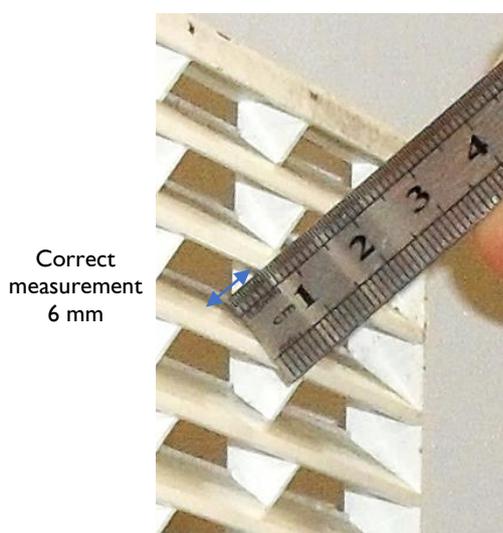
$$\text{Total free area} = 1080 \text{ mm}^2 \times 11 \text{ holes} = 11880 \text{ mm}^2$$

$$\text{Convert to cm}^2 = 11880 \text{ mm}^2 \div 100 = 118.8 \text{ cm}^2$$



Vents with angled louvres

If a vent has angled or sloping louvres it is important to use the correct method to measure hole width. Use a steel rule with the base of the rule resting flat on a louvre. Measure the air gap only; do not include the thickness of the vent material.



Terracotta air bricks



Air bricks are an acceptable form of air vent for gas appliances although their free area is small. They are often used in a supplementary role with other types of vent, or when ventilation requirements are just above adventitious allowance (page 8).

Many air bricks have holes which taper down in size from front to back. Free area must be calculated from the smaller side. Unfortunately, the back of the air brick will be inside the wall cavity, making it impossible to access. This problem can be solved by using a tapered measuring device or by inserting drill bits of increasing diameter as shown above.

Intumescent air vents



Intumescent vents are needed when ventilation must pass through a fire-resistant wall. They close when overheated in the event of a fire. A special material inside the vent expands greatly to completely block air flow. This limits the spread of smoke and poisonous gases and stops the vent from acting as a source of oxygen for the fire.

Intumescent vent closure is permanent. After activation, the vent must be replaced before gas appliances can be re-commissioned.

Ventilation of open flue appliances

Manufacturer's instructions (MI) will specify appliance ventilation requirements. If MI are unobtainable, room ventilation for an open flue appliance can be calculated as:

$$\text{Ventilation required (cm}^2\text{)} = \text{Net heat input (kW)} \times 5$$

Note: this formula does not apply to decorative fuel effect (DFE) fires (see below).

Adventitious air

In older, unrenovated properties a significant amount of 'adventitious' air comes into rooms through gaps around window frames, door frames and floorboards. Where adventitious air is available, the ventilation requirement of one open flue appliance in the room can be reduced by **35 cm²**.

Note: reducing vent size by 35 cm² is equivalent to subtracting 7 kW from appliance heat input in the ventilation formula. A non-DFE open flue gas fire of heat input 7 kW or lower therefore does not need an air vent in a room where adventitious air is available.

Properties built after 2002 and older, fully-renovated properties may have double glazing and improved draughtproofing which reduces or eliminates adventitious air. A gas engineer must make an informed on-site decision whether adventitious air is available or not.

Decorative fuel effect (DFE) appliances

A DFE is a type of gas fire in the form of a basket of ceramic radiants made to look like coal, wood or stone placed inside or underneath an open chimney. *Note: unlike DFEs, inset live fuel effect (ILFE) fires have a convector canopy or heat exchanger above the radiant bed. ILFE fires should not be confused with DFEs.*

Most DFEs need an air vent of **100 cm²** regardless of heat input. This value has already had adventitious allowance taken off and should not be reduced further. Air vents for DFEs should not be situated inside the chimney area.



DFE

Requires 100 cm² ventilation



ILFE (not a DFE)

Ventilation according to above formula

Open flue ventilation – worked examples

1. A living room in a new house contains an open flue ILFE fire of heat input 6.5 kW net

$$6.5 \times 5 = 32.5 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ ventilation required.}$$

There is no allowance for adventitious air in a new-build property.

2. A kitchen in an unrenovated house built in 1989 contains an open flue boiler of 26 kW net

$$26 \times 5 = 130 \text{ cm}^2$$

Assuming adventitious air is available, $130 - 35 = 95 \text{ cm}^2$ ventilation required.

3. A room in an unrenovated house built in 1983 contains a DFE

100 cm² ventilation required as standard for DFEs.

4. A bedroom of a unrenovated 1970s house contains an open flue gas fire of 6.6 kW gross

Using the conversion chart (page 5), $6.6 \text{ kW gross} \div 1.1 = 6.0 \text{ kW net}$

$$6.0 \times 5 = 30 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ ventilation required.}$$

Adventitious ventilation provides 35 cm², so no vent is required.

5. A room in an unrenovated pre-war house contains an open flue boiler of 72,000 BTU / h

Using the conversion chart (page 5), $72000 \div 3787 = 19 \text{ kW net}$

$$19 \times 5 = 95 \text{ cm}^2$$

Assuming adventitious air is available, $95 - 35 = 60 \text{ cm}^2$ ventilation required.

Ventilation of flueless appliances

Manufacturer's instructions (MI) will specify appliance ventilation requirements. If MI are unobtainable, use the flueless ventilation chart from BS 5440-2 (adapted below):

Appliance type	Maximum heat input NOTE 1	Room volume NOTE 2	Vent size required NOTES 3 & 4	Openable window needed? NOTE 5
Cooker, grill or hotplate	No specified maximum	< 5 m ³	100 cm ²	YES
		5 to 10 m ³	50 cm ² if there is no door to outside No vent needed if there is a door to outside	
		> 10 m ³	No vent required	
Instantaneous water heater	11 kW (net)	< 5 m ³	Not permitted (At Risk)	YES
		5 to 10 m ³	100 cm ²	
		> 10 to 20 m ³	50 cm ²	
		> 20 m ³	No vent required	
Fire in habitable room	0.045 kW (net) / m ³	Minimum 22.22 m ³ / kW	If heat input ≤ 2.7 kW = 100 cm ² Otherwise = (Heat input – 2.7) × 55 + 100 cm ²	YES
Fire in hallway, landing etc.	0.090 kW (net) / m ³	Minimum 11.11 m ³ / kW	If heat input ≤ 5.4 kW = 100 cm ² Otherwise = (Heat input – 5.4) × 27.5 + 100 cm ²	YES

Ventilation chart for flueless appliances

Note 1: heat input limits apply to certain types of flueless appliance. For example, flueless fires are limited to a heat input of 0.045 kW per cubic metre of available room volume.

Note 2: unlike open flue appliances, which draw new air into a room, flueless appliances simply use up oxygen and replace it with products of combustion (POC). Room size is therefore an important factor in the safe dilution of POC and in determining flueless appliance ventilation.

Note 3: adventitious allowance should not be deducted for flueless appliances.

Note 4: flueless appliance ventilation should come directly from outside, either through an air vent on an outside wall or via a continuous duct to outside.

*Note 5: because they emit heat and water vapour into the room, flueless appliances need additional **purge ventilation** in the form of an openable window to outside or equivalent (e.g. an extractor fan or cooker hood extractor). The householder can open the window or turn on the extractor if the room becomes hot, stuffy or humid because of appliance emissions.*

Flueless ventilation – worked examples

1. A kitchen of 12 m³ contains a flueless water heater of 8 kW net heat input

From the chart, 50 cm² ventilation and an openable window are required.

2. A room of 9 m³ with no door to outside contains a flueless cooker

From the chart, 50 cm² ventilation and an openable window are required.

3. A flueless fire of heat input 3.1 kW (net) is to be installed in a living room of 70 m³

First determine whether the room is big enough. From the chart, room size must be at least $3.1 \times 22.22 = 68.9$ m³. The room size is acceptable.

The required ventilation is:

$$\begin{aligned} & (\text{Heat input} - 2.7) \times 55 + 100 \\ & = (3.1 - 2.7) \times 55 + 100 \\ & = 0.4 \times 55 + 100 \\ & = 122 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ and an openable window} \end{aligned}$$

4. While performing a landlord's safety check you encounter a flueless fire of net heat input 3.0 kW installed in a living room of 36 m³. You measure the room air vent as 100 cm².

From the chart, room size must be at least $3.0 \times 22.22 = 66.7$ m³. This room is too small. This is an At Risk situation.

Ventilation required is $(3.0 - 2.7) \times 55 + 100 = 116.5$ cm². The room vent is less than 90 % of the required size. This is a second At Risk situation.

Two related At Risk situations may be upgraded to Immediately Dangerous.

5. A flueless water heater of net heat input 13 kW is installed in a kitchen of 40 m³

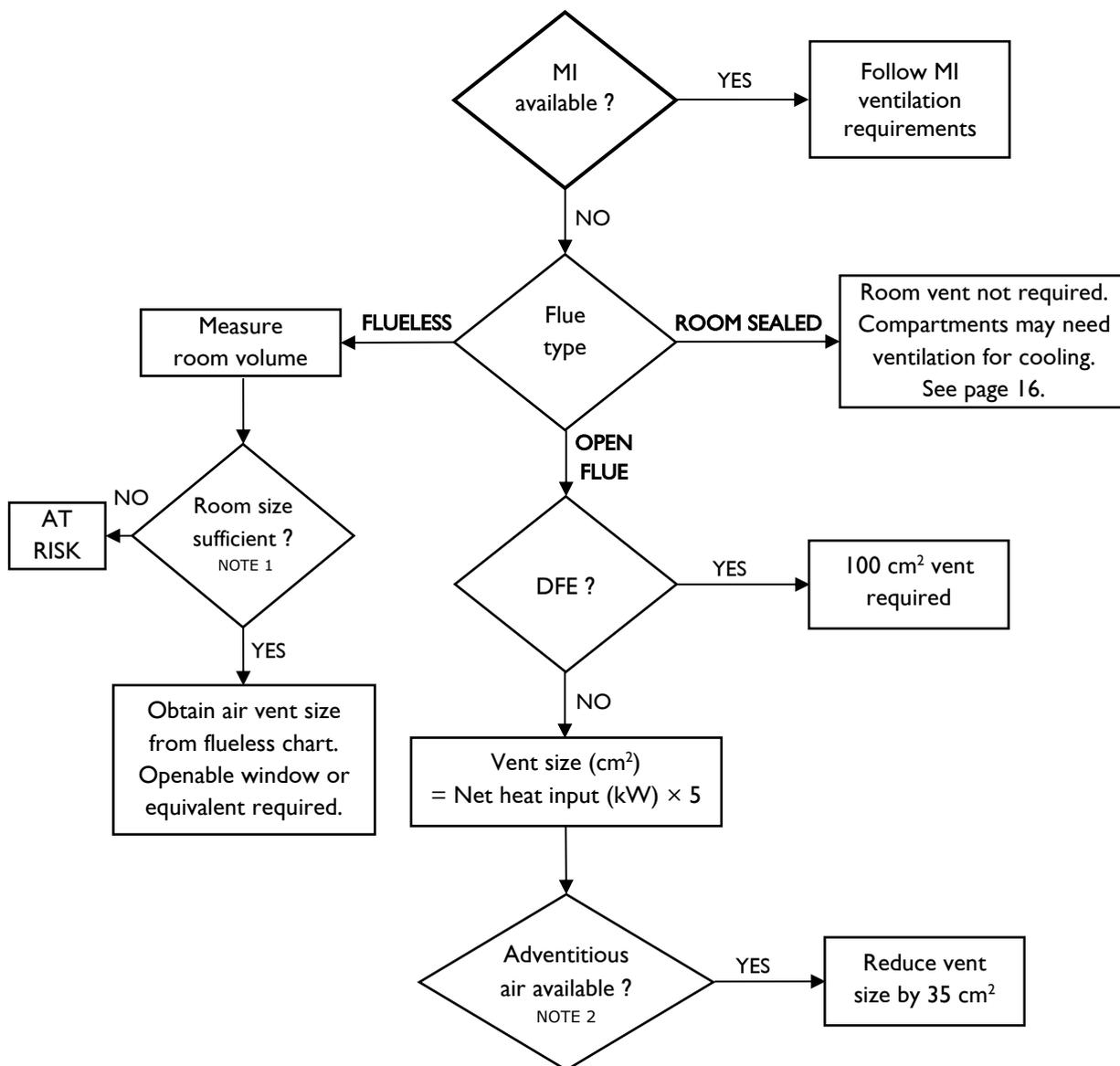
From the chart we see that the water heater's heat input is above the 11 kW limit. This is an At Risk situation.

Open flue and flueless ventilation – summary of differences

Flueless appliance ventilation	Open flue appliance ventilation
If MI unobtainable, use chart (page 10)	If MI unobtainable, use formula (page 8) 100 cm ² for DFEs
Must be direct, i.e. air must come directly from outside or be ducted from outside	Can be indirect, i.e. air can be taken through a series of internal vents. See page 19.
No adventitious allowance	35 cm ² adventitious allowance in older, unrenovated properties (not for DFEs)
Vent size dependent on room volume for cookers and water heaters	Vent size not dependent on room volume
Minimum room sizes apply for water heaters and fires	No minimum room size
Additional purge ventilation (e.g. openable window) required	No purge ventilation required

Note: the term 'purge ventilation' is not related to the purging of air from gas installations.

Ventilation flowchart for a room containing a single appliance



Note 1: flueless instantaneous water heaters require a room volume of at least 5 m³. Flueless gas fires require the room volume to be at least 22.22 m³ per kW net heat input for habitable rooms and 11.11 m³ per kW net heat input for non-habitable rooms.

Note 2: properties built after 2002 or older properties that have been renovated to modern standards may not have any source of adventitious air.

Ventilation of rooms containing more than one appliance

Where a room contains more than one gas appliance, we use the **multi-appliance rule**:

A room's overall ventilation requirement is the largest of either:

- the total requirement of all **open flue space heaters**, or:
- the total requirement of all **flueless space heaters**, or:
- any other individual requirement

*Note 1: **space heaters** are appliances designed to heat living spaces, e.g. fires, warm air heaters and central heating boilers. Cookers and water heaters are not space heaters and are always considered individually. Although they heat the room via wastage, this is not their purpose and they should never be used as space heaters (their carbon monoxide emissions are too high for continuous use).*

Note 2: for open flue space heaters, take off any adventitious allowance only once from the total requirement, not for each individual appliance.

Note 3: for exactly two appliances, the rule simplifies to: 'if both appliances are space heaters of the same flue type, add their requirements; otherwise, fit the larger vent requirement only.'

Multi-appliance ventilation – worked examples

1. A kitchen of 18 m³ in an unrenovated 1990s house contains the following gas appliances:

- a) a flueless water heater of net heat input 8.5 kW
- b) an open flue central heating boiler of net heat input 28 kW
- c) an open flue gas fire of net heat input 5 kW

From the flueless chart, appliance a) requires 50 cm² and an openable window.

Appliances b) and c) are both **open flue space heaters**. According to the multi-appliance rule, we must find their total ventilation requirement. We can treat them as a single appliance of combined heat input 28 + 5 = 33 kW. Taking adventitious air into account, their ventilation requirement is $33 \times 5 - 35 \text{ cm}^2 = 130 \text{ cm}^2$

The open flue space heaters' requirement is larger than that of the water heater, so the room must be fitted with a vent of 130 cm². An openable window is also needed because there is a flueless appliance in the room.

2. What ventilation is needed in an unrenovated 1950s house for a 20 m³ kitchen containing:
- a) a flueless cooker
 - b) an open flue boiler of net heat input 26 kW
 - c) a flueless water heater of net heat input 10 kW
 - d) an open flue gas fire of net heat input 6 kW

From the flueless chart, appliance a) does not require purpose-provided ventilation but does require an openable window.

From the flueless chart, appliance c) requires 50 cm² and an openable window. *Note: a single window is sufficient for both flueless appliances.*

Appliances b) and d) are both **open flue space heaters**. According to the multi-appliance rule, we must find their total ventilation requirement. We can treat them as a single appliance of $26 + 6 = 32$ kW. Taking adventitious air into account, their ventilation requirement is $32 \times 5 - 35 = 125$ cm²

The largest requirement is for the open flue space heaters, so the room needs 125 cm² ventilation. An openable window is needed because there are flueless appliances in the room.

3. What is the ventilation requirement of a 70 m³ living room containing:
- a) a DFE of net heat input 5.6 kW
 - b) a flueless gas fire of net heat input 2.9 kW

Both a) and b) are space heaters but are not of the same flue type, so their ventilation requirements are not added. Instead, the room should be ventilated to the larger requirement.

Appliance a) needs 100 cm²

According to the flueless ventilation chart, the room size for appliance b) should be at least $2.9 \times 22.22 = 64.4$ m³. The room is big enough.

Appliance b) needs $(2.9 - 2.7) \times 55 + 100 = 111$ cm²

The larger requirement is for appliance b), so the room needs 111 cm² ventilation. An openable window is needed because there is a flueless appliance in the room.

Compartment ventilation

*Note: for **balanced compartments** see page 18.*

Open flue and room sealed appliances may be installed in compartments for decorative reasons. There should be a warning label fitted inside the compartment informing the householder not to block vents and not to use the compartment for storage or airing linen unless there is a purpose-designed partition.

A compartment for an open flue appliance shall be ventilated for combustion air and cooling.

A compartment for a room sealed appliance does not need ventilation for combustion air but *may* need cooling ventilation. The only way to be certain is to consult manufacturer's instructions (MI). If MI are unobtainable, assume cooling ventilation is required.

Compartment vents shall be provided at both high and low level. The low-level vent allows the entry of cool air. The high-level vent allows the removal of warm air by convection. For open flue appliances, high-level and low-level vents should communicate with the same internal space or outside wall. Otherwise, there is the possibility of **cross-ventilation**, where unequal air pressures create draughts potentially harmful to the operation of the flue.

If MI are unobtainable, the table below can be used to size compartment vents:

Vent sizes (cm ² per kW)	Open flue		Room sealed	
	Vents to outside	Vents to room	Vents to outside	Vents to room
High-level	5	10	5	10
Low-level	10	20	5	10

Compartment vent size table

Note: there is no allowance for adventitious air in compartment vent sizing.

In the case of an open flue appliance in a compartment vented to a room, the room must be ventilated according to the usual requirements of the appliance.

Compartments shall not be used to house open flue appliances in a bathroom or shower room. Compartment air vents shall not communicate with a bathroom or shower room.

Ventilation may be ducted into a compartment from a ventilated roof space. Separate ducts shall be provided to high and low level. The cross-sectional area of ducts shall be at least equal to the area of the vents they serve. A ventilated roof space may be considered as outside air if sufficiently ventilated to BS 5250 but otherwise should be treated as an internal space.

Compartment ventilation – worked examples

1. A room sealed boiler of 28 kW net heat input is to be installed in a compartment with air vents communicating directly to outside air

From the table, the compartment requires:

$$28 \times 5 = 140 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ at high level}$$

$$28 \times 5 = 140 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ at low level}$$

2. An open flue water heater of 18 kW net heat input is installed in a compartment with air vents communicating with a kitchen

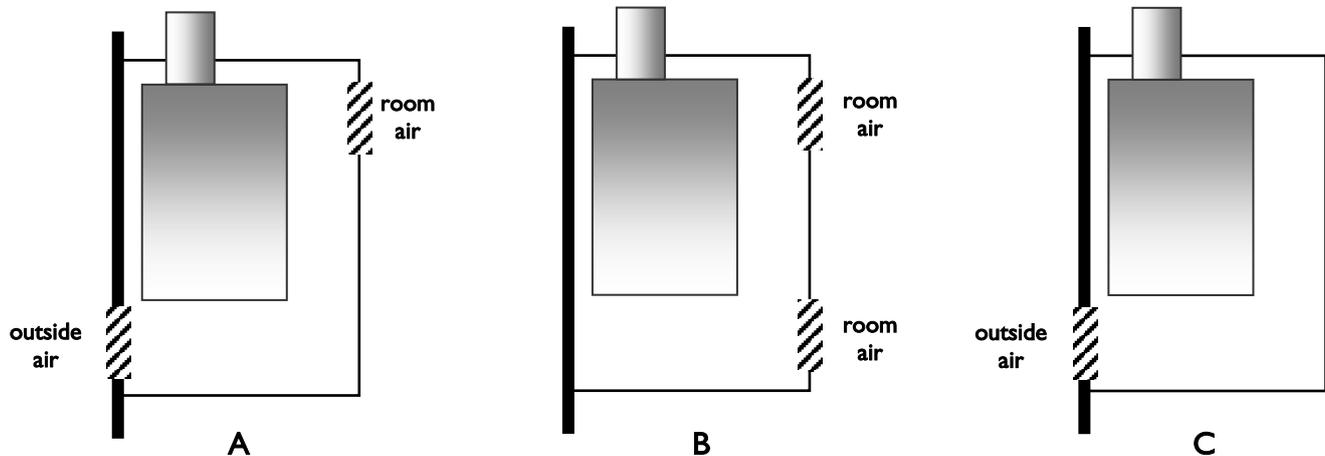
From the table, the compartment requires:

$$18 \times 10 = 180 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ at high level}$$

$$18 \times 20 = 360 \text{ cm}^2 \text{ at low level}$$

The kitchen requires a vent of $18 \times 5 = 90 \text{ cm}^2$ (55 cm² if adventitious air is available).

3. Are the following open flue compartment installations acceptable or not?



A – Unacceptable: vents are communicating with different spaces (cross ventilation).

B – Acceptable

C – Unacceptable: no high-level ventilation is provided.

Balanced compartments

A balanced compartment is a purpose-designed housing for an open flue appliance. It brings some of the advantages of a room sealed balanced flue; for example, low-level flue termination.

To achieve 'room sealed' status the compartment door is draughtproofed, self-closing and interlocked with the appliance so that the appliance cannot function when the door is open. A notice is attached stating that the door must be kept closed at all times.

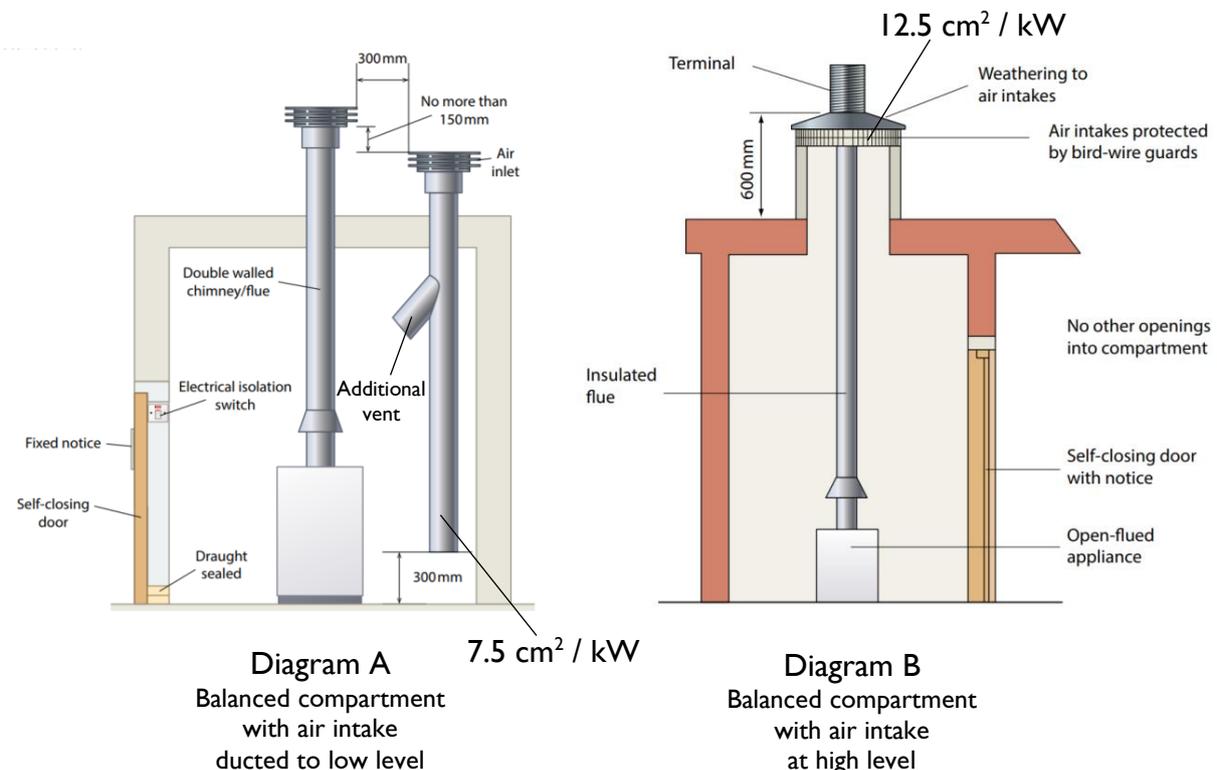
To achieve the balanced flue effect, the sole air inlet to the compartment is situated no more than 150 mm below the flue outlet (so that they are in the same atmospheric pressure zone).

Two types of balanced compartment exist (Diagrams A and B below). These have different ventilation requirements.

If the air intake is ducted to low level (Diagram A), the duct and vent shall have minimum cross-sectional area of 7.5 cm^2 per kW net of the appliance's maximum rated input.

Note: if the ceiling of the compartment is more than 300 mm above the bottom of the downdraught diverter, an additional high level opening should be provided in the air duct of the same size as the duct.

If the air intake is at high level (Diagram B) it shall have minimum free area of 12.5 cm^2 per kW net of the appliance's maximum rated input.



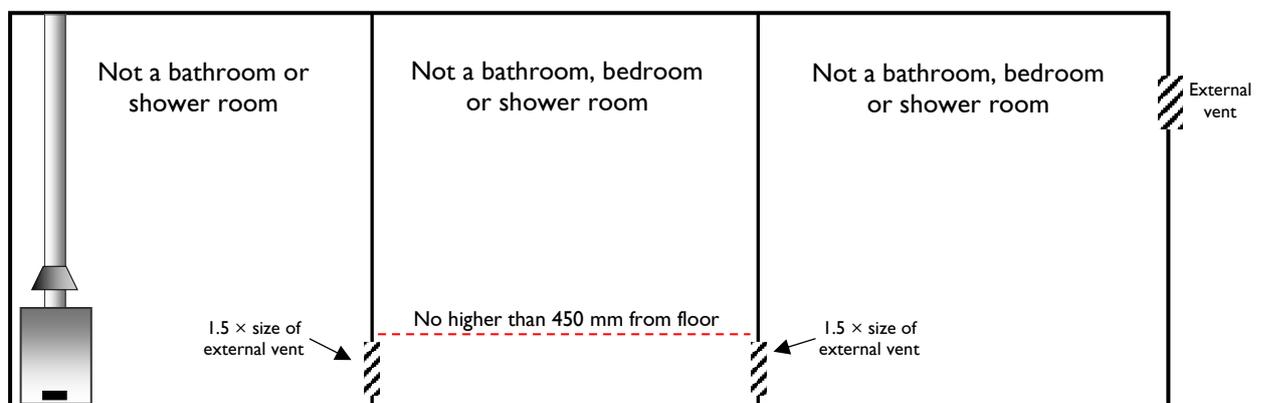
Indirect ventilation

If there is no suitable external wall, combustion air for open flue appliances may be brought in indirectly through an adjoining room or series of rooms via internal air vents.

Note: combustion air for flueless appliances shall be taken directly from outside or be ducted directly from outside.

If the air path passes through more than one internal wall, all internal vents should be 1.5 times larger than the external vent (which is sized in the usual way; see page 8). The air path cannot pass through a bathroom, shower room or bedroom.

Internal air vents should be no higher than 450 mm from the floor in order to slow down the passage of smoke and poisonous gases in the event of a fire.



Indirect ventilation

Indirect ventilation – worked example

An open flue water heater of net heat input 15 kW is installed in the kitchen of a renovated house. Ventilation is to be taken through two adjoining rooms. Calculate the size of the external vent and the two internal vents, stating any positional requirements.

$$\text{External vent: } 15 \times 5 = 75 \text{ cm}^2$$

The house is renovated so we ignore adventitious air.

Both internal vents will be $75 \times 1.5 = 112.5 \text{ cm}^2$, no higher than 450 mm off the floor.

Glossary

Adventitious air	Air entering a room through gaps in window frames etc.
Air : gas ratio	The respective volumes of air and gas going into combustion
Air vent	An open grille designed to allow air into a room or compartment
Balanced compartment	A room sealed, balanced flue housing for an open flue appliance
Balanced flue	A flue with terminal in the same pressure zone as its air intake
Carbon	Chemical element produced by incomplete combustion as soot
Carbon monoxide	A poisonous, odourless gas produced by incomplete combustion
Carbon dioxide	One of the products of combustion of gas
CO	Chemical formula of carbon monoxide
CO ₂	Chemical formula of carbon dioxide
Combustion air	Air used for the combustion of gas
Compartment	A cupboard or housing for an appliance
Complete combustion	Gas burned with enough oxygen to produce negligible CO
Cross-ventilation	Ventilation from different pressure zones causing draughts
Downdraught diverter	Part of an open flue that reduces the impact of wind
Flue	The chimney of an appliance
Flueless	Type of gas appliance with no chimney or flue
Free area	The total area of the openings in an air vent
Gas	Commonly-used abbreviation for natural gas
Heat input	A measure of the gas usage of an appliance in units of power
Hydrocarbon	A compound made up of only hydrogen and carbon
Incomplete combustion	Gas burned with too little oxygen , producing carbon monoxide
Indirect ventilation	Ventilation taken through a series of internal vents
Intumescent air vent	A special type of vent which permanently closes if there is a fire
Methane	A hydrocarbon fuel gas with the chemical formula CH ₄
MI	Manufacturer's instructions
Natural gas	A fuel gas composed mostly of methane
Open flue	Type of gas appliance with a chimney or flue
Oxygen	The active part of air that supports combustion
POC	Products of combustion
Products of combustion	Exhaust/waste gases produced by a fuel-burning appliance
Purge ventilation	A controllable source of cool fresh air, e.g. an openable window
Room sealed	Type of gas appliance completely sealed from the room it is in
Space heater	An appliance designed to heat living spaces
Soot	Black powdery deposits of carbon from incomplete combustion
Vent	Another name for an air vent
Ventilation	Provision of combustion air or cooling air to an appliance
Ventilator	Another name for an air vent
Vitiation	Contamination of combustion air by products of combustion