FLUORINATED GAS (F-GAS) GUIDANCE FOR BUILDING OWNERS & FACILITIES MANAGERS

Making Compliant and Future-Proof HVAC System Decisions in 2025-2026 and Beyond

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⚠ CRITICAL: UK REGULATORY UNCERTAINTY

This guidance is based on EU regulations and UK government consultation (December 2025). However, the UK has NOT yet confirmed its final F-Gas regulatory timeline.

DEFRA decision expected: Late 2026

The UK may take a SLOWER timeline than the EU, which would change the urgency of your system replacement decisions.

> ACTION: Review this guidance again after DEFRA's decision is published.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guidance is essential reading if you operate buildings with refrigeration, air conditioning, heat pump, or chiller systems. F-gas regulations are tightening globally. The UK is navigating regulatory uncertainty, with major decisions expected in late 2026.

What You Need to Know:

- F-gases are extremely potent climate pollutants—some 24,000 times more powerful than CO_2
- Regulatory bans ARE already in force (January 2025) and will likely expand in 2027-2030
- Your HVAC system purchases today could face costly retrofits in 5-10 years (IF UK aligns with EU)
- Non-compliance can result in fines up to £200,000 and enforcement action
- Three scenarios exist—choose based on your risk tolerance and system lifespan

Confidence Levels:

- Immediate compliance (2025): 95% confident ✓
- 2027-2030 timeline: 50-70% confident ⚠
- Long-term retrofit costs: 40-50% confident ❓

1. WHAT ARE F-GASES AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

F-gases (fluorinated greenhouse gases) are synthetic chemicals used in refrigeration, air conditioning, heat pumps, foam blowing, and fire suppression. They are extremely effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Climate Impact

F-gases are measured by their Global Warming Potential (GWP):

- SF_6: GWP of 24,300 (24,300× worse than CO_2)
- R-410A (common refrigerant): GWP of 2,088
- R-32 (newer refrigerant): GWP of 675
- R-454B (low-GWP alternative): GWP of 466

A single kilogram of R-410A released has the same warming effect as driving a car 3,000 miles. When your refrigeration system leaks or is decommissioned improperly, you're directly contributing to climate change.

Business Risk

- Civil penalties: Up to £200,000 per infringement
- Equipment replacement cost: £20,000-£120,000+
- Reputational damage and customer loss
- Insurance claims rejection

2. THE UK'S UNCERTAIN POSITION

Understanding UK regulatory uncertainty is KEY to your decision-making.

What's Confirmed (95% confidence)

- ✓ January 2025: R-410A banned for systems <3kg (already in effect)
- ✓ 5-year service records required for systems >5 tonnes CO_2 equivalent
- ✓ Leak detection and repair requirements are law

What's Uncertain (50-70% confidence)

- ❓ 2027 onwards: Will UK align with EU bans on R-32?
- ❓ 2029-2030: Will large VRF/chiller bans apply?
- ❓ Timeline: Slower (2030+) or faster (2027) phase-out?
- ❓ Exemptions: Will certain building types/sizes be exempt?

Scenarios (What Could Happen)

- Scenario A (40% likelihood): UK follows EU slowly (decision by 2030s)
    - → R-32 systems get 3-5 more years of service life
- Scenario B (40% likelihood): UK aligns with EU 2024 (2027-2030 bans)
    - → R-32 systems face retrofits starting 2027
- Scenario C (20% likelihood): UK takes middle ground (2028-2032 timeline)
    - → R-32 systems remain viable until early 2030s

3. THREE-SCENARIO DECISION FRAMEWORK (Choose Your Risk Level)

Because the UK regulatory timeline is uncertain, we offer THREE approaches. Choose based on your risk tolerance and system lifespan.

SCENARIO A: 'CAUTIOUS / FUTURE-PROOF' (Recommended for 15+ year systems)

Philosophy:

Assume worst-case: UK aligns with EU 2024 revision by 2027. Plan accordingly.

Recommended Refrigerant Options:

- R-454B (GWP 466) — Moderate future-proofing
- HFO/Ultra-low GWP (GWP <10) — True future-proof
- Water-based systems — Ultimate future-proof
- Upfront Cost: 5-50% higher than R-32
- Retrofit Risk (2027-2030): MINIMAL
- Confidence Level: 85% you avoid future retrofits

Best For:

Long-term owned facilities, net-zero commitments, ESG targets

SCENARIO B: 'BALANCED' (Recommended for 10-15 year systems)

Philosophy:

Assume middle-ground: UK takes slower timeline (2030+ instead of 2027). Plan retrofit budget for 2029-2032.

Recommended Refrigerant Options:

- R-32 (GWP 675) — Current industry standard, moderate risk
- R-454B (GWP 466) — Slightly higher cost, less risk
- Upfront Cost: R-32 standard, R-454B +5%
- Retrofit Risk (2029-2032): MODERATE (budget £30-50k)
- Confidence Level: 65-70% you avoid major disruption

Best For:

Commercial buildings, moderate climate commitments, balanced risk tolerance

SCENARIO C: 'COST-OPTIMIZED' (Recommended for <10 year systems)

Philosophy:

Assume short lifespan: System will be replaced before major UK bans. Minimize upfront cost.

Recommended Refrigerant Options:

- R-32 (GWP 675) — Standard option, lowest cost
- Upfront Cost: Standard (baseline)
- Retrofit Risk (Within 10 years): LOW (system replaced naturally)
- Confidence Level: 90% no issues within system lifespan

Best For:

Temporary facilities, leased buildings, planned replacement cycles

Quick Comparison: Three Scenarios

Scenario	Upfront Cost	Retrofit Risk	Best For

A: Cautious (R-454B/HFO)	5-50% higher	Minimal (15%)	15+ year systems
B: Balanced (R-32/454B)	Standard	Moderate (60%)	10-15 year systems
C: Cost-Optimized (R-32)	Lowest	Low (10%)	<10 year systems

4. WHAT YOU MUST DO NOW (2025-2026)

BUILDING OWNERS

- ☐ Request FM to provide complete HVAC equipment audit (refrigerant type, GWP, capacity, age)
- ☐ Ask FM for 5-year service records (for systems >5 tonnes CO_2 equivalent)
- ☐ Budget for potential retrofit costs (£20-120k) in 5-year financial planning
- ☐ Choose decision scenario (A/B/C) based on building lifespan and ESG goals
- ☐ Set calendar reminder: Check DEFRA decision (expected late 2026)

FACILITIES MANAGERS

- ☐ Conduct full audit: List every system (make, model, refrigerant, GWP, capacity)
- ☐ Verify contractor F-Gas certification (Regulation 30, 31, 33-35)
- ☐ Ensure all systems >5 tonnes CO_2 eq. have annual leak detection records
- ☐ Keep service records for 5 years minimum; document all repairs/refrigerant added
- ☐ Get commitment from contractor: Can they service low-GWP options post-2027?
- ☐ For systems nearing replacement: Get quotes for R-454B or water-based alternatives
- ☐ Brief building owner on scenario (A/B/C) and recommend choice

5. MONITORING AND DECISION POINTS

Key Dates to Watch:

Late 2026: DEFRA publishes F-Gas Regulation decision

- → ACTION: Review this guidance again. If UK aligns with EU, move to Scenario A. If slower timeline, remain in Scenario B/C.

2027: First EU ban phase occurs (if UK aligns)

- → ACTION: Accelerate replacement of R-32 systems if UK has adopted EU timeline.

2029-2030: Large system bans expected (if UK aligns)

- → ACTION: Major VRF/chiller replacement cycle likely if UK follows EU.

6. COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

IMMEDIATE (This Year)

- ☐ Complete F-gas equipment audit
- ☐ Verify all systems have required leak detection
- ☐ Confirm 5-year service records on file
- ☐ Verify contractor F-Gas certification is current

SHORT-TERM (6-12 Months)

- ☐ Choose decision scenario (A/B/C)
- ☐ Get quotes for refrigerant alternatives based on scenario
- ☐ Plan equipment replacement schedule aligned with scenario
- ☐ Set budget for retrofit contingency (£20-50k minimum)

ONGOING (Every Year)

- ☐ Conduct annual leak detection on systems >5 tonnes CO_2 eq.
- ☐ Maintain service records (5-year retention)
- ☐ Monitor DEFRA and Environment Agency updates
- ☐ Review after DEFRA decision (late 2026)

CONCLUSION

F-gas regulations are tightening. The UK's exact timeline is uncertain, but staying ahead of compliance is essential.

> Three paths exist. Choose based on your building's lifespan and risk tolerance. Monitor for DEFRA's late-2026 decision and adjust if needed.

Start planning today. The cost of inaction is higher than the cost of future-proofing now.
