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## Tenants freeze while rental market stays hot

The recent cold snap has left many Victorian renters freezing, while the competition for rental properties stays red hot.

“In the hottest rental market in recent history, tenants will freeze this winter because rental properties are generally older, with less insulation and more inefficient heating. More than twice as many tenant households rely on electric heating as their main source of heating compared to owner-occupiers. This means they have greater exposure to the cold and they pay higher bills” said Toby Archer, Policy and Liaison Worker.

Victoria’s rental laws do not mandate minimum health, safety or energy efficiency standards. As a result, it is legal for landlords to rent properties without heating or hot water. A recent survey by the Victorian Council of Social Service found 10 percent of properties had no fixed heating. The Victorian Utility Consumption Household Survey 2007 found 22 percent of private rental properties used electric space heating compared to just 9 percent for owner occupied properties.

“Many rental properties have old gas heaters which have not been regularly checked and maintained. Landlords generally devote only a small amount of their rental income on maintaining their rental properties and servicing their gas appliances is one of the jobs that often get overlooked” said Mr Archer.

While Energy Safe Victoria recommends gas appliance be checked and serviced every two years, this is not mandatory.

“This combination of policy failure and neglect by landlords means many tenants are exposed to either extreme cold or unsafe gas appliances, sometimes both” said Mr Archer.