



PRESS RELEASE

ONE MAN'S VISION BUILDS SAFETY GROUP

Middlesex, September 2006 – The gas-*elec* Group has a lot to celebrate, as the original company reaches its tenth anniversary. Founded in 1996 with the birth of gas-*elec* Safety Systems, the group now has more than 130 franchisees – most of them in the established gas-*elec* Safety Systems network, with the rest in aqua-*lec*, the new plumbing franchise which the group will be showcasing with presentations on the hour, every hour on Stand N120 at the National Franchise Exhibition.

This year, gas-*elec*'s engineers will carry out more than 100,000 inspections in people's homes all over the country, generating a turnover of more than £9 million.

The driving force behind the network is founder and managing director John Davidson, who came over to England from Belfast in the 1971 as a newly-qualified electrician determined to make his fortune. Now he is well on the way to doing that, not only for himself but for his franchisees.

It was in the mid-1990s when Davidson realised the potential offered by the then new gas and electrical Regulations, designed to lift safety standards in the residential lettings sector. Like all good ideas, his plan was revolutionary but simple – one specially-trained engineer to do several inspections in one visit, saving landlords and property managers time, money and hassle. He launched gas-*elec* Safety Systems on exactly that premise.

"I was already competent on the electrical side so when the gas came along the natural thing was to put the two together and get one person to do both," he said. "Lots of people in the trade said don't be ridiculous, that's never going to work."

They were wrong! Like all entrepreneurs, Davidson was ahead of his time and as the lettings market began to realise the benefits of combined inspections, gas-*elec* was

ready to meet their needs. It is this ability to anticipate the market that is part of the reason for *gas-elec*'s success.

Davidson is passionate about safety both at home and in the workplace, and sees new legislation as a springboard to continue expanding the network.

“New regulations such as Part P and Part L of the Building Regulations, all these things keep moving the boundaries and the potential. For instance, we launched a second franchise – the *gas-elec* Electrical franchise – in advance of Part P and that's a great success. Now, to meet the demands of new fire safety regulations, we've launched *fire-ec*, a fire risk assessment package for commercial property.”

He would like more attention paid to safety in the owner-occupied market and sees the forthcoming Home Information Pack (HIP) as a way of focusing a buyer's attention on the condition of a property.

“Discussion about the HIP has highlighted the importance of the electricals and gas in the home seller market,” he says. “Vendors and agents will need to go to market with as much information on each property as they can muster if they are going to achieve a quick sale and maximise the price. We are uniquely placed with the network and experience to provide a full utility inspection package for the home seller – or buyer – in just one call.”

Given the strong presence of *gas-elec* in the domestic market, the launch of the complementary *aqua-ec* plumbing franchise was partly in answer to client demand.

“Many of our clients look to us to provide a one-stop service,” says Davidson. “Introductions to our established client database are part of the marketing package that we can offer to our *aqua-ec* franchisees.”

A major reason for the success of *gas-elec* and *aqua-ec* franchisees is the strength of the experienced head office team. Training, marketing and business support are first class and designed to ensure that all franchisees are successful. However, Davidson warns against would-be franchisees thinking they are “buying a job”.

“The fact remains that the more proactive a franchisee, then the more likely he or she is to make a success of the business they've invested in. In that sense, franchising is

no different to setting yourself up in your own business. To succeed in either, you must have enthusiasm, commitment and the desire to succeed. What you should get in a successful franchise is a total format business package. It's your own business, but you're not on your own."

All training is carried out in the company-owned City & Guilds and CITB approved training centre at West Drayton, near Heathrow Airport. Would-be franchisees undergo a pre-investment free-of-charge assessment in the training centre to help them decide if their chosen franchise is right for them "and they're right for us," says Davidson.

Training is modular and varies in length depending on franchisees' individual skills. Once on board, the maximum training time for a gas-*elec* franchisee is 17 weeks including ACS gas assessments, which take place in the company's CITB approved assessment centre, and working out on site with an experienced franchisee. The electrical franchise is suitable only for already qualified electricians, so new entrants undergo a seven-day induction course before hitting the ground running. And the aqua-*lec* City & Guilds plumbing course takes up to 12 weeks, including working on site, after which franchisees gather workplace-based evidence for their NVQ2 qualification.

Marketing is local, regional, national and continuous. The gas-*elec* franchise is a two-tier franchise whereby a regional management franchisee markets the business and obtains work for the gas-*elec* Safety Inspectors in his or her area. The aqua-*lec* franchise is a single tier franchise, where the franchisee markets his or her own area with help from their head office colleagues in the form of a launch marketing and PR campaign, the content of which is developed and agreed with each franchisee during training.

Ongoing business support for all franchisees in the gas-*elec* group includes call handling up to seven days a week, centralised invoicing and credit control, bookkeeping and IT support. Removing this .back office. responsibility from the franchisees allows them more time for productive work and maximises their profits.

People who may be interested in a gas-*elec* or aqua-*lec* franchise need to have real "hands on" skills. Gas or electrically qualified men and women, skilled or semi-skilled engineers are ideal for gas-*elec*. The training is rigorous and the need for safety

paramount. *aqua-lec* plumbers do not touch gas or electrical work but still need to have a “hands on” aptitude but the skills requirement is a little more relaxed in that a talented DIY-er could get through the course. Hence the need for the all-important assessment before the commitment to invest is made.

The investment for a *gas-elec* franchise is £18,600, and for an *aqua-lec* franchise £22,350. This allows for use of the brand, intellectual information and property; rights to a prime area of responsibility; a network of national suppliers; the national freephone service; stationery and printing; operations manual and a local PR launch campaign, plus specialised technical and IT equipment, tools and branded workwear.

gas-elec Open Days and *aqua-lec* Discovery Days are held weekly on alternate weeks. Would-be franchisees attend a full presentation and have the opportunity to ask as many questions as they want afterwards. They also meet some of the head office support team and fully inspect the purpose built training facilities for themselves. This is the first stage of the recruitment and decision-making process for both the franchisor and for any would-be franchisee. The company goes to enormous lengths to make sure that the business and the franchisee “gel” before any investment is made.

As *gas-elec* celebrates its tenth anniversary, John Davidson continues to look to the future, as he forecasts a group presence in 2% of all the homes in UK: “We’re a quarter of the way there already.” Moving that vision forward, the company has just launched its Home Services Report – a utilities inspection for homebuyers, sellers and buy-to-let investors – and a central heating maintenance programme for the domestic market is in development. And the vision for the future? “Next step – the *gas-elec* plc.,” says Davidson.

For more information about *gas-elec* group franchises or to book a place at an Open or Discovery Day call 0800 015 2030 or take a look at www.gaselec.co.uk or www.aqua-lec.com.

ENDS/...

Editor’s Notes

Founded in 1996, **gas-elec** carries out impartial safety inspections and light remedial works. Its unique inspection service provides the residential lettings market with

multiple inspections of the gas and electrics in just one visit. **gas-elec** has over 126 franchisees operating from 18 regional offices, who this year will carry out more than 120,000 safety inspections in domestic properties throughout the UK. For more information visit www.gas-elec.co.uk.

Issued by: gas-*elec* Safety Systems
Contact: Pauline Chandler
PR & Marketing Manager
Tel: 01892 782068
Email: pauline.chandler@gas-elec.co.uk