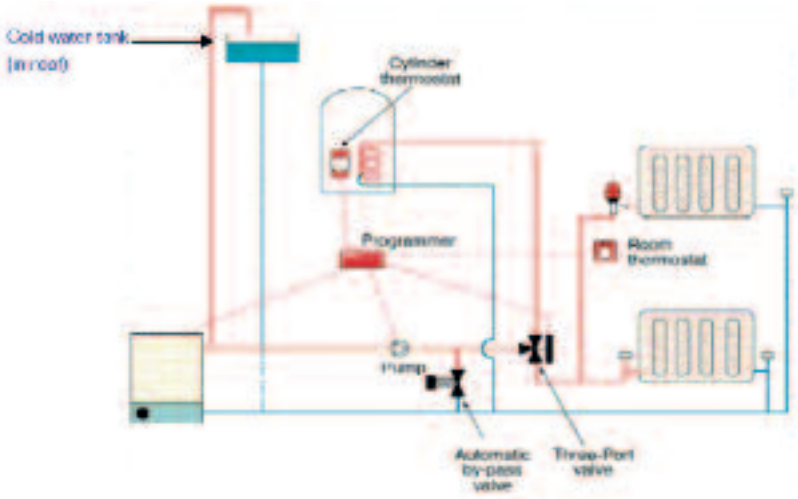
Your Central Heating System

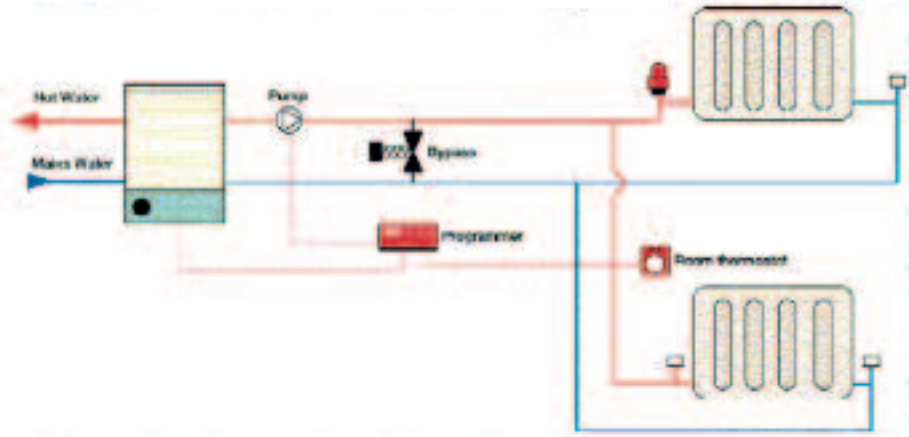
Central heating systems generally mean a boiler heating cold water to circulate heat to radiators and also to provide hot water. A standard system provides hot water by storing it in a cylinder usually located in your airing cupboard.

The other type of system heats water for radiators and hot water on demand. It does this by means of a 'combination' or 'combi' boiler.

Below are diagrams of both types of system and some of the common controls you may have.



A normal central heating system



A combination (combi) system

What do you do if you have problems with your heating or hot water?

BOILER PROBLEMS

There are a number of things you can do to help yourself before you decide if it is necessary to call Westcountry for assistance, and to speed up the work of a heating engineer if he is called out to your property.

1. Check that the power supply to your boiler and programmer is turned on, this could be shown as a red light on the switch next to your boiler or programmer/time clock in the airing cupboard or close to the boiler.
2. Once you have established that there is an electrical supply to the heating system, you then need to check that there is a gas supply available.
   i) If you have a pre-pay gas card, check that the card is inserted into the meter properly, and that you have sufficient credit on the card.
   ii) If you have another gas appliance, for example a cooker, this can be done by turning the gas cooker on. If the cooker works and you can light it then there is a gas supply to the boiler.
3. If you think there is no gas supply, check the gas meter, this is usually in a box on the outside wall or in an older property may be in a cupboard under the stairs or in the hallway.
4. i) If this is a pre-pay card type meter, you will need to ensure that you have credit on it. The meter counter will show you how much credit is on the meter.
   ii) If you don't have a card meter and there is no gas supply you will need to call your gas supplier and report the fault.
5. If you have checked the above, and you have established that there is gas and electricity to the boiler:
   i) Turn the programmer to the 'on' position.

ii) Turn the room thermostat up (if you have one).

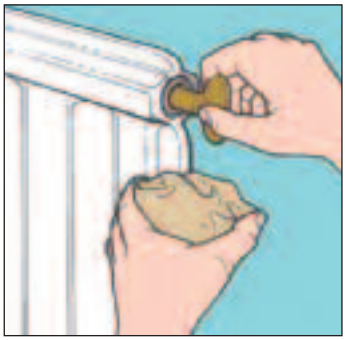
6. Some systems have fitted thermostatic radiator valves on each radiator, these should be turned to the highest setting to fire up the boiler. Once the room is hot enough they can be turned down to suit your required comfort level.
7. If the boiler is a combination type the hot water should come on as soon as a hot tap is opened. If it is a system with a cylinder in the airing cupboard there will be a small dial on the side, this should be set to 65 degrees. It will take approximately 20 minutes to heat a full tank from cold.

RADIATOR PROBLEMS

Is there a cold area at the top of the radiator?

This is usually an indication that air has got into the system somewhere and has become trapped. Air in a radiator will rise to the top forming a pocket stopping the hot water from getting to that part. This can be released, but remember to turn the heating off first. Now, armed with a rag beneath, use a radiator key to slacken the air bleed valve, which is at one end towards the top of the radiator. There will be a hissing sound as the air comes out. As soon as water begins to flow, close the vent again and wipe away any water.

Take care - the water may be hot! The heating can then be switched back on.



Radiators should not need frequent 'bleeding'. If they do, air is getting in and a professional should sort this.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Is there a cold area at the bottom of radiator?

This is a sign of rust and sludge build up which is sitting in the bottom of the radiator.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Are the upstairs radiators cold?

This is often an indication that the feed and expansion cistern in the loft has run dry. This should not happen and indicates another problem, which needs to be corrected by a qualified engineer.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Are the downstairs radiators cold?

This is an indication that the pump may have stopped working. It will need to be tested and, if necessary, replaced.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Are all radiators cold or not very warm?

This is again an indication of the build up of rust and sludge.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Are the radiators cooler in one area of the house?

This tells you that the radiators are not properly balanced. The nearest radiators to the boiler are taking more than their share of the hot water from the system.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Are the radiators warm upstairs when the heating is off but the hot water is on?

If this happens, it is probably because the check valve on a gravity fed system has failed. In a gravity fed system, the hot water cyclinder is heated by water from the boiler, which flows due to the gravity and not a pump. To prevent the water also heating the

radiators when the heating is off, a check valve is fitted. If this has failed, the radiators upstairs will begin to receive some of the heat.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Is the feed tank in the roof overflowing?

If the ball valve is not closing off the water supply properly, the cistern will continue to fill and water will come out from the overflow pipe. The usual cause is either a poorly adjusted valve or a worn washer.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

NOISY HEATING

A number of different things may cause noise problems with a heating system.

Water gurgling or bubbling

This might be a sign that air has got into the system. This can be released by bleeding air from the radiators as previously detailed.

Action: *if you are unsure, call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Humming or Buzzing

The pump, which sends the water around the system, may be set too fast. Pumps can also cause this noise in the pipe work through vibration of the pipes.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

Knocks and creaking

Everywhere that pipes pass through other materials like floor joists or walls, there is a possibility that they will rub slightly when they expand (while heating up) or contract (when cooling down), this is quite natural and should not be a cause for concern.

Noisy boiler

This may be caused by sludge and scale inside the boiler, which results in some areas heating up more than others. The result is usually intermittent banging caused by pockets of steam. The same sludge build up can also restrict the flow of water, which will result in noisiness. Air in the boiler may also cause noises.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

There may be a lack of water. A frozen pipe or an air lock can cause this, or the mains water may have been switched off.

Action: *call the Maintenance Department and ask for a heating engineer to be called.*

If you or someone you know would like this 'Your Central Heating' leaflet on CD or audio tape, in large print, in Braille or translated into another language, please contact us on 01803 200300 or email info@westcountryha.org.uk

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Westcountry Housing

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