

Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF₆)

Sulphur Hexafluoride (SF₆) is widely used in the switchgear installed on our networks. It is an excellent insulating gas and has been used for this purpose worldwide for over 20 years. In recent years it has become evident it is a potent greenhouse gas with 22,000 times the effect of carbon dioxide. Our leakage levels are relatively low, approximately 200kg per year, but its potency gives us cause for concern.

We are actively seeking alternative materials to help insulate our equipment with good progress being made at lower voltages up to 11,000 volts. We are also commissioning research work to investigate new materials for use at higher voltages but this will inevitably take time to come to fruition. Most existing equipment that contains SF₆ is not time expired and any programme to reduce leakage will inevitably require us to replace some of these earlier than might otherwise be the case.

We believe this is an important issue and propose we replace those SF₆ units that leak the most, have the largest volumes of SF₆ or are in situations where other work reduces the net impact of replacing units early. Stakeholder views are invited on the appropriateness of this approach.