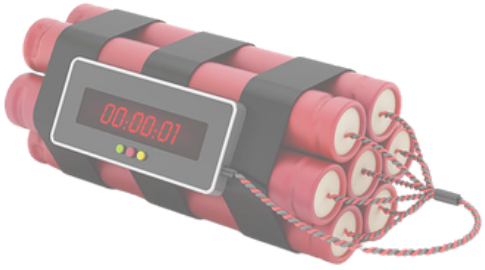
NATIONAL REFRIGERANTS

R134a Shortage: Is Your Car's Air Conditioning Ready for 2027?



This year saw the hottest summer on record, according to provisional Met Office figures, highlighting the importance of having a fully functioning air conditioning system in our cars.
As vehicles get older, refrigerant loss can become more common, reducing A/C performance or causing the system to stop working altogether. Traditionally, the solution has been simple: recharge the system and restore its cooling performance.

But what happens when the refrigerant you need is no longer readily available?
As we head towards 2027, this is becoming a very real concern for millions of UK motorists.

Why is R134a becoming harder to find?

Since 2015, the UK and Europe have been operating under a phased reduction in hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerant quotas. These reductions are designed to limit the use of refrigerants with a high environmental impact and encourage the transition to more environmentally friendly alternatives.
Refrigerants are assigned a Global Warming Potential (GWP) rating, which measures their contribution to global warming relative to carbon dioxide (CO_2), which has a GWP of 1. The higher the GWP, the greater the potential environmental impact.
Since the mid-1990s, R134a has been widely used in automotive air conditioning systems. However, with a GWP of 1,430, it is now facing increasing restrictions.
From 1 January 2017, all new cars sold in Europe were required to use refrigerants with a GWP below 150, driving the widespread adoption of R1234yf, which has a GWP below 1.
Despite this transition, an estimated 20 million or more cars on UK roads still rely on R134a. With demand for servicing and recharging these vehicles continuing, the impact of tightening supply is becoming increasingly apparent, with significant price increases throughout 2026.

Why 2027 could be a turning point

Under the HFC quota system, the amount of refrigerant that can be placed on the market is progressively reduced. Crucially, quota consumption is linked to GWP, meaning higher-GWP refrigerants use up significantly more quota per kilogram than lower-GWP alternatives.
The UK's available HFC quota is set to fall from 31% of the 2015 baseline to just 24% in January 2027.
With less quota available, manufacturers are increasingly incentivised to prioritise lower-GWP refrigerants, allowing them to supply more kilograms of product within the same quota allocation.
For R134a, the outlook is particularly challenging. Industry estimates suggest that the volume available in 2027 could be equivalent to just 20% of actual demand.
If these estimates prove accurate, the consequences could be significant for workshops, service providers and motorists alike, with restricted availability and rising costs making it increasingly difficult to keep older vehicles' A/C systems running.
For drivers, that could mean being left hot under the collar.

For more information, call: 01455 630 790

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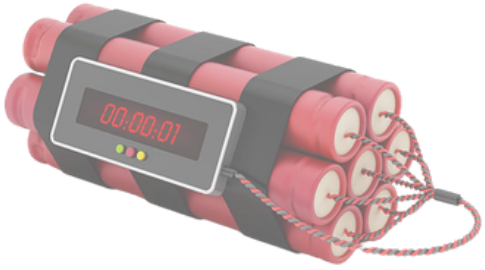

The good news: There's an alternative

It is not all doom and gloom. National Refrigerants, the UK's largest automotive aftermarket refrigerant supplier, will be offering an alternative to R134a designed to help keep suitable vehicle air conditioning systems running.
Introducing R456A.

R456A is a refrigerant blend comprising:
45% R134a
49% R1234ze
6% R32

With a GWP of 687 (IPCC AR4), R456A has less than half the global warming potential of R134a. Its lower GWP also means that approximately twice as many kilograms can be supplied for the same quota allocation, helping to make more efficient use of increasingly limited HFC quota.
This offers a practical way to address the challenges ahead while reducing the environmental impact associated with refrigerant use.

Switching to R456A is straightforward

For suitable applications, switching to R456A can be as straightforward as recharging with R134a, helping workshops adapt to changing refrigerant availability.
Scan the QR code for the complete instruction guide and find out how easy it is to convert to R456A.
As 2027 approaches and R134a supplies come under increasing pressure, now is the time to understand your options and prepare for the change.

Don't get caught out in the heat. Explore R456A with National Refrigerants and keep your A/C solutions ready for 2027.

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