

Information packs

What is carbon monoxide (CO), what are the symptoms of poisoning and what should I do?

Within this pack you'll learn about how you can protect yourself and others by installing an audible alarm and other products. This includes maintenance of the alarm and the relevant action to take in a situation.



An Introduction to carbon monoxide (CO)

Information pack 1

CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) IS A HIGHLY POISONOUS GAS, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS 'THE SILENT KILLER' BECAUSE YOU CAN'T SEE IT, TOUCH IT OR SMELL IT.

This odourless gas is produced when common fuel-burning appliances and equipment that use natural gas, oil, wood, propane and kerosene, don't get enough air to burn up completely.

This incomplete combustion allows carbon monoxide to build up rapidly, especially in a confined room or space – and this can lead to toxic effects on humans and pets.

COMMON SOURCES OF CARBON MONOXIDE

Most households have, on average, 2-3 appliances that can produce carbon monoxide.

THESE APPLIANCES INCLUDE:

- Boiler
- Water heater
- Fire/space heater
- Hob
- Cooker
- Dryer
- Barbecue
- Portable generators

Most of these sources are associated with malfunctioning fuel-burning equipment, appliances, poor venting and confined spaces, like a cupboard, garage, cabin, tent, boat cabin, caravan or camper.

POOR MAINTENANCE/IMPROPER VENTING

Poor maintenance of these appliances, damaged or blocked venting, or inadequate airflow can cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide to build up inside your home, garage, cottage – virtually any enclosed space under certain conditions.

SIX SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR

Being aware of the symptoms could save your life.

1. Headaches
2. Dizziness
3. Nausea
4. Breathlessness
5. Collapse
6. Loss of consciousness

Carbon monoxide symptoms are similar to flu, food poisoning, viral infections and simply tiredness. That's why it's quite common for people to mistake this very dangerous poisoning for something else.

Other signs that could point to carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Your symptoms only occur when you are at home.
- Your symptoms disappear or get better when you leave home and come back when you return.
- Others in your household are experiencing symptoms (including your pets) and they appear at a similar time.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Don't assume your gas appliances are safe: get a Gas Safe registered gas engineer to do a check. This is the only safe way to prevent yourself and those around you from incurring serious illness or death due to carbon monoxide exposure.

- Get fresh air immediately. Open doors and windows, turn off gas appliances and leave the house.
- See your doctor immediately or go to hospital - let them know that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you think there is immediate danger, call the Gas Emergency Helpline on 0800111999.
- Get a Gas Safe registered engineer to inspect your gas appliances and flues to see if there is a dangerous problem.