

CO – BE ALARMED

**A GUIDE TO
STAY SAFE FROM
CARBON MONOXIDE
POISONING**



**CARBON
MONOXIDE**
BE ALARMED!

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Carbon monoxide (CO) is a deadly gas that cannot be seen, smelt or tasted. It can be produced by everyday household items and you would never even know it is there.

The CO – Be Alarmed campaign aims to raise awareness of this gas and let people know how they can stay safe.

All the information that you will need to stay safe can be found in this booklet; the causes, symptoms and ways to keep safe.

Long or serious exposure to CO can lead to permanent brain damage or death

ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE

Carbon monoxide (CO) is produced when a fuel is not burnt properly. This mostly happens with faulty boilers, gas fires, cookers or when a chimney or ventilation shaft is blocked.

The six main symptoms of CO poisoning are: headaches, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness, collapse and loss of consciousness.

The symptoms are often confused with a cold or the flu. If your symptoms disappear when you leave the house or are affecting other people in the home as well, you may have been exposed to CO.

Long or serious exposure to CO can lead to permanent brain damage or even death. Around 40 people die from CO poisoning every year and a further 4000 people are treated in hospital.





FIT AN ALARM

CO cannot be seen, smelt or tasted. The only way to know for sure that you are safe is by installing an audible CO alarm. They can be bought from DIY shops, supermarkets and high street shops and are available from around £15. It is a small price to pay to know that you are safe in your home.

Once you have bought an alarm you need to install it correctly. Each alarm comes with installation instructions. A general rule is to place it around head height. It doesn't have to be on the wall, it can also be on a shelf or bookcase. Do not place it on the ceiling or floor, within a meter of a boiler or by something which produces steam like a kettle.





KNOW THE SIGNS

It can sometimes be difficult to recognise the signs of CO poisoning if you do not have an alarm.

It is important to keep a close eye out for the symptoms:

- **Headaches**
- **Dizziness**
- **Nausea**
- **Breathlessness**
- **Collapse**
- **Loss of consciousness**

These can often be mistaken for a cold or the flu, so, other signs to look out for are:

- **The symptoms only occur at home**
- **They disappear or get better when you leave but come back when you return**
- **They are worse when the heating is turned up in the winter**
- **Other people (or pets) in the house are feeling them too**

There are other danger signs to look out for:

- **Soot or yellow/brown stains around an appliance**
- **Excessive condensation in a room with an appliance**
- **Lazy yellow/orange gas flame rather than a blue flame**
- **Pilot lights that regularly go out**





SERVICE YOUR APPLIANCES

CO is most often caused by faulty appliances in the home. It is incredibly important to make sure your appliances are serviced each year by a qualified and registered engineer.

If you live in privately rented accommodation, your landlord must provide proof that a Gas Safe registered engineer has safety-checked the appliances within the last 12 months.

Blocking any kind of ventilation is very dangerous



UNBLOCK VENTILATION

Blocking ventilation such as chimneys or vents is very dangerous and can lead to a build-up of CO.

Blocking ventilation to appliances is also very dangerous because they need a constant supply of air to work properly.

Make sure that you have your chimney swept once a year and check that vegetation hasn't blocked outside vents.



STAYING SAFE OUTDOORS

The danger of CO is often associated with appliances in the home and the colder winter months. However, we regularly see people falling ill on camping trips throughout the year.

Many items commonly associated with camping and the summer, such as BBQs and campfires, can produce CO. When used in an enclosed space, in tents, gazebos, marquees, etc, CO can build up very quickly.

You should never bring a BBQ into your tent, even if it has been extinguished for a long time. BBQs continue to give off CO after they have gone out. If you are going camping or on holiday take a portable CO alarm with you to stay safe.



IN AN EMERGENCY

There are 5 important steps to take if you have been affected by CO



Step 1

Open doors or windows for ventilation and leave the room to get some fresh air.



Step 2

Seek medical advice from your doctor if you are feeling unwell, or call 999 if it's an emergency.



Step 3

Turn off all appliances and get them checked by a registered engineer – do not use them until you're told it is safe to do so.



Step 4

Call the relevant emergency advice line:

Gas Emergency Service 0800 111 999

Solid Fuel Advice Line 0845 601 4406

Oil 0845 658 5080



Step 5

If the gas appliances are in the property, do not smoke, do not turn light switches on or off and do not do anything to create a spark.

If you feel unwell, or others or pets are suffering from symptoms including headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness and unconscious seek medical attention immediately.



Q&A

JUDE SELLMAYER'S STORY

How were you affected by carbon monoxide?

Very badly, I had 28.85% in my blood. I was very nauseous, I couldn't walk straight, I was in hospital for 48 hours on pure oxygen and I lost a lot of weight. I vomited for approximately 10 to 14 days. This had an ongoing effect meaning I was off work for four months. It took almost two years to get back to my normal weight.

What was the source of the carbon monoxide?

It was a faulty gas boiler in a kitchen. The home I was in at the time did not have a CO detector.

How did you realise that you were in danger?

I had a previous experience around two years earlier. So my past experience was helpful. I woke up and felt the dizziness. Since I had prior experience alarm bells rang as I came downstairs and I found the other person in the house also very poorly. Two and two linked together and I just thought "I've been here before".

What happened after you raised the alarm?

The ambulance arrived within minutes. Two fire engines arrived. The gas distribution company, Transco, arrived soon after. We both got outside and opened all the windows. The emergency services would not allow us to go back in the house. We were taken into the ambulance and put immediately on oxygen because they thought we had carbon monoxide poisoning and we were then taken to the hospital.

“ Get an alarm today because tomorrow could be too late ”

What advice would you give to others?

Get an alarm today because tomorrow could be too late! It is that quick, it is that dangerous. You should not assume that just because an appliance is new that everything is safe. You need to have your appliances serviced once a year. You cannot see it, you cannot taste it, you cannot smell it so you do not actually know it's there.

What does CO – Be Alarmed mean to you?

I am absolutely passionate about the campaign. I may not have been here today; two people may have been lost. It would have been such a ridiculous tragedy to have lost your life when an alarm costs just £15.

How has your experience changed your life?

I think any near death experience changes you completely. I got a carbon monoxide alarm, I actually have two in the house that I am in, and I really live for the day. You never know when anything is going to happen so make sure you enjoy your life.

What more can be done to raise awareness?

I think private rentals should have a carbon monoxide alarm. I also think all council houses should have one. It is also about people taking responsibility. I went out to Asda on a Saturday night to buy one because all the little shops were shut. I could not find any and they said “we don't do them, it's not the time of year”. It should be all year round, it is not a winter thing.

CO – Be Alarmed contacts

Call 020 7747 2941

Visit www.co-bealarmed.co.uk

Follow @CoBeAlarmed

Gas Emergency Service

0800 111 999 (24 hours)

Solid Fuel Advice Line

0845 601 4406

Oil (OFTEC)

0845 658 5080