

CARBON MONOXIDE IS A HIGHLY POISONOUS GAS THAT HAS NO COLOUR, TASTE OR SMELL

Carbon Monoxide - Be Alarmed! is the national campaign to reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by Carbon Monoxide.

Each year, there are around 30 Carbon Monoxide deaths and many more people suffer health problems due to Carbon Monoxide exposure. In extreme cases paralysis and brain damage can be caused.

This brochure explains the nature and scale of the dangers posed by this poisonous gas and sets out the campaign's mission to save many needless deaths and injuries.



WHY BE ALARMED?

Too many people in the UK die or become seriously ill from Carbon Monoxide poisoning – incidents that could be prevented if they had greater awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide, had their appliances serviced regularly and fitted an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm.

Carbon Monoxide poisoning, even at levels that do not kill, can cause serious harm to health if breathed in over a long period. In extreme cases paralysis and brain damage can be caused.¹

This poisonous gas is produced when appliances are incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained or if flues, chimneys or vents are blocked. Gas, oil and solid fuels such as coal, coke and wood can all produce Carbon Monoxide.

All appliances – including stoves, fires, boilers and water heaters – should therefore be serviced and checked annually by a registered engineer. In the case of gas this should be carried out by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Gas Safe Register replaced CORGI in Great Britain and the Isle of Man on 1 April 2009.

Since you can't smell, see or taste Carbon Monoxide, an audible alarm is also essential for further protection.

As finances are squeezed in the current economic climate, there is a significant risk that householders will cut further corners on maintaining their appliances, unwittingly increasing the dangers for themselves and their families and neighbours.

THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

There are around 30 deaths each year from Carbon Monoxide poisoning but unfortunately this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is no co-ordinated system for recording Carbon Monoxide incidents across all fuels, so any figures collated at a national level inevitably provide only a partial picture of the problem. The situation is further confused by the similarity between the early symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning (including headaches, nausea and tiredness) and those of illnesses such as flu.

Worryingly, new research for this campaign suggests that 4.8 million people do not consider Carbon Monoxide as a serious health risk or believe that Carbon Monoxide poisoning is rare.²

SERVICING APPLIANCES

For protection all gas appliances should be installed by and serviced annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. Oil and solid fuel appliances should also be serviced annually by appropriately qualified engineers. Only half of people claim to do this³, suggesting that some 15 million households are at risk because of this. Nearly a quarter of people never have their appliances checked or don't know when they were last checked.³



Stacey Rodgers suffered every parent's worst nightmare when her 10-year-old son Dominic died in 2004. He had been poisoned by Carbon Monoxide, which had seeped into his bedroom from a boiler flue positioned in a covered passageway between Stacey's home and the house next door.



Melissa Matthews' brother Tony died 10 years ago after a faulty grill caused Carbon Monoxide to build up in his flat. Melissa was just 13 at the time, but now feels ready to talk about her loss and hopes her story will convince others to take action and protect themselves from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

Even those people who believe they are taking the necessary measures may be mistaken. A recent survey carried out for Gas Safe Register revealed that more than half of UK householders trust their gas engineer is registered and qualified without ever checking their credentials⁴.

Contact information for Gas Safe Register and registered bodies for other fuel types are included on the back page of this report.

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HAVING AN AUDIBLE ALARM

The latest Carbon Monoxide - Be Alarmed! research suggests that some 19 million households are at risk because they do not have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm in their home. Even if people do have an alarm, they could still be at risk if they don't test them annually. Less than half (47%) of people with audible alarms in their home had tested them in the last year.²

Carbon Monoxide alarms need to become more of a priority; 30% of people said they simply hadn't got around to getting one and 11% said they didn't know an alarm was available to detect Carbon Monoxide. Smoke alarms are now commonplace, with over 80%⁵ of households claiming to have one, but just 19% have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm.²

The cost of Carbon Monoxide alarms has dropped significantly in recent years to around £15 and they can be purchased at DIY stores and some supermarkets or can be bought directly from energy suppliers.

Only by taking both precautions of having an alarm and regularly servicing appliances will homes be fully protected.

KNOWING THE SYMPTOMS

Knowing the symptoms is your last line of defence, but the figures are worrying, with only 6% of people very confident that they would recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.³ Surprisingly, nearly a quarter of people don't realise that you can actually die from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.³

There is also anecdotal evidence that suggests even healthcare professionals find it difficult to recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. To assist medical professionals in the diagnosis and management of Carbon Monoxide poisoning the Health Protection Agency and other stakeholders published a diagnostic algorithm in March 2009.

WE'RE ALL AT RISK

Anyone can be affected by Carbon Monoxide poisoning and we are all at risk if we use home appliances burning gas, wood, oil or coal – or our neighbours do, as Carbon Monoxide can seep through walls.

The risk of incidents occurring in any particular area depends upon many factors, including the type of housing; whether the home is owned or rented; the numbers of householders without English as a first language; and the ability and inclination of people to pay for new appliances, servicing and alarms.

People living in rented accommodation may be at higher risk as they are often not responsible for the purchase or maintenance of their appliances. Many tenants are not fully aware of their right to demand an annual service of appliances and ensure that they have a current gas safety certificate. It is also very important that tenants allow engineers access to their home to carry out checks and servicing, as refusing means they are putting both themselves and their neighbours at risk.



34 year-old Rascim Sherwani had the scare of his life when he started having chest pains and palpitations while watching TV in March this year.

He managed to get to the phone to dial 999 before he passed out. He and his flatmates were rushed to hospital with Carbon Monoxide poisoning caused by a blocked flue. Fortunately all survived.

Those living in non-English speaking communities or with a poor understanding of English themselves can be at greater risk because of difficulties in understanding the information on the issue and a lack of awareness of the measures they should be taking to protect themselves.

Young children and elderly people are particularly at risk from Carbon Monoxide poisoning because their bodies are less able to withstand the effects of Carbon Monoxide poisoning (half of those killed are aged under 12 or over 60). The elderly are also more at risk because they are more likely to use older appliances and have a lower awareness of the potential danger and spend more time at home.

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¹ Health and Safety Executive

² Ipsos MORI face-to-face Omnibus survey of 1,915 adults aged 18+ in GB, 27th November – 3rd December 2009. 161 sample points used

³ YouGov online survey of 4,000 adults, September 2008

⁴ Gas Safe Register

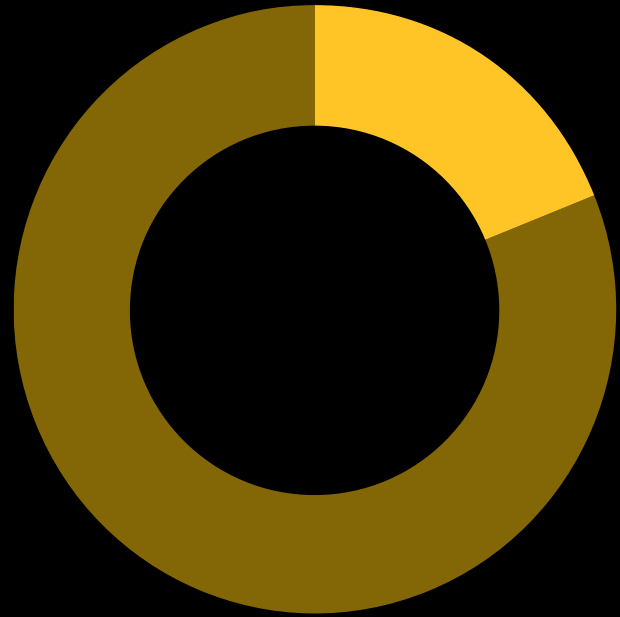
⁵ Home Office (81% of UK households have at least one smoke alarm) and Ipsos MORI findings (85% of GB households claim to have at least one smoke alarm) closely tally

⁶ Net figure combining those answering "I think Carbon Monoxide poisoning is rare" (7%) and/or "Before now, I have never thought of Carbon Monoxide as a significant risk to my health" (7%)

KEY FACTS

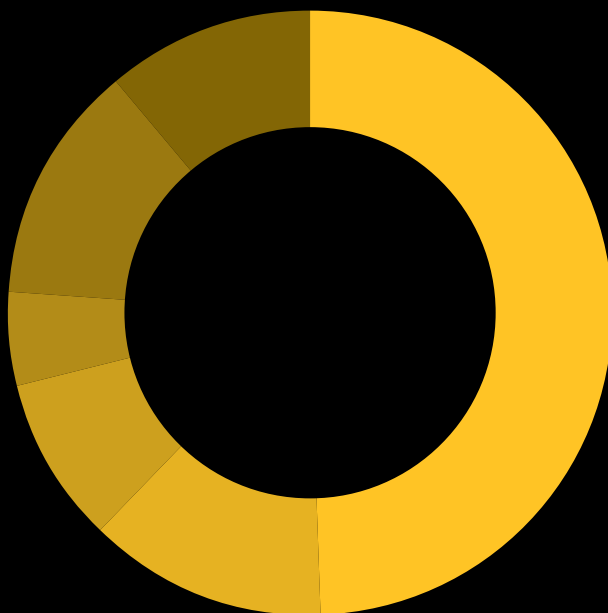
- Some 81% of British households don't have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm²
- Only 47% of people with audible alarms in their home had tested them in the last year²
- Some 15 million households don't have their fuel-burning appliances serviced annually³
- Only 6% of people are very confident that they would recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning³

Do you have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm?²



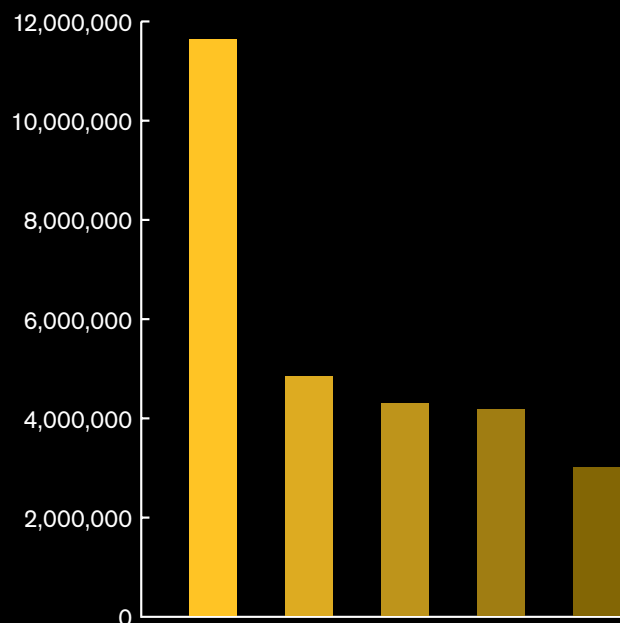
- 19% Yes
- 81% No

When was the last time you had your heating and cooking appliances checked by a registered/qualified installer/engineer?³



- 50% In the last 12 months
- 13% More than 12 months ago but within the last 2 years
- 9% More than 2 years ago but within 5 years
- 5% More than 5 years ago
- 13% Never
- 11% Don't know

Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you do not currently have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm?² (GB adults)



- 11,650,000 I have not got around to getting one
- 4,850,000 I do not consider Carbon Monoxide a health risk or think poisoning is rare⁵
- 4,300,000 My landlord has not provided one
- 4,190,000 I didn't know an alarm was available to detect Carbon Monoxide
- 3,020,000 I do not have any gas appliances in my home

THIS CAMPAIGN IS SEEKING SUPPORT FOR TWO LEGISLATIVE CHANGES WHICH WILL MAKE A MAJOR DIFFERENCE

1. In order to receive a gas safety certificate, landlords should offer tenants a Carbon Monoxide alarm

This would ensure that many of the most vulnerable members of society are offered the protection of a Carbon Monoxide alarm.

The existing legal requirement for a gas safety certificate means that an appropriately qualified and registered installer checks the safety of gas appliances.

2. Every new home should be fitted with a wired-in Carbon Monoxide alarm

To mirror the current requirement for a wired-in smoke alarm to be fitted in all new-build homes, Building Regulations should be amended to require an audible wired-in Carbon Monoxide Alarm to be installed. This is a simple measure, which will add no significant cost to the home builders if the Carbon Monoxide alarm is installed at the same time as the smoke alarm.

Since the campaign launched in October 2008, the Government is now considering proposals to amend Part J (Combustion appliances and fuel storage systems) of the Building Regulations. One of the issues under consideration is the potential to incorporate a provision for the installation of Carbon Monoxide alarms.

The Carbon Monoxide – Be Alarmed! Campaign is now supported by 40 organisations in addition to the members of the Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance (COCAA).

COCAA members

- The Association of Professional Independent Chimney Sweeps (APICS)
- British Gas
- CO-Gas Safety
- CoGDGM
- CORGI Trust
- Curzon
- Dominic Rodgers Trust
- EDF Energy
- Energy Networks Association
- The Energy Retail Association
- E.ON Energy
- The Gas Industry Safety Group
- The Guild of Master Sweeps
- Heating and Hotwater Industry Council
- HETAS
- HVCA
- Institute of Chimney Sweeps
- The Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering (IPHE)
- The National Association of Chimney Sweeps
- National Grid
- Natural Fires
- npower
- OFTEC
- Scotia Gas Networks plc
- Scottish and Southern Energy
- ScottishPower/ManWeb
- The Solid Fuel Association
- UKLPG
- Valor Fires
- Walsall Housing Group
- The Caravan Club
- Carlisle Student Housing
- Chartered Institute of Housing
- Chief Fire Officers Association
- Disabled Go
- DIY Doctor
- Dr Chris Steele
- Dr Rob Hicks
- Family Week Limited
- Fife Constabulary
- The Fire Fighters Charity
- Gas Call Services
- Gas Guide
- Gas Maintenance and Training Ltd
- Help the Aged
- Homes for Students website
- Mechanical and Electrical Training
- National Association of Caravan Owners
- National Childminding Association
- National Federation of Tenant Management Organisations
- National House Building Council
- National Union of Students
- North East Ambulance Service
- North Wales Police
- ParGas
- Royal College of GPs
- Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents
- Shropshire Fire and Rescue Headquarters
- Southern Fire and Rescue, Leicester
- South Yorkshire Police
- Spice Gas Services
- Student Bunk website
- Student Pad website
- Tenants and Residents Association of England
- Tenant Participation Advisory Service
- Wrekin Housing Trust

STEPS TO KEEP YOUR HOUSEHOLD SAFE



1. SERVICE YOUR APPLIANCES

- Have all gas appliances serviced and safety-checked annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. To check if an engineer is Gas Safe registered visit www.gassaferegister.co.uk or call 0800 408 5500.
- If you live in rented accommodation with gas appliances your landlord must provide you with proof that a Gas Safe registered engineer has safety-checked the appliances within the last 12 months.
- For solid fuel appliances, contact HETAS (www.hetas.co.uk or 0485 634 5626) and or oil appliances contact OFTEC (www.oftec.co.uk or 0845 658 5080).



2. FIT AN AUDIBLE ALARM

- Alarms can be bought from many DIY stores, some supermarkets and most energy suppliers for as little as £15. If you are a tenant, your landlord may provide you with one.
- We do not recommend the use of 'Black Spot' indicators as these are often not as accurate and will not alert or wake you if Carbon Monoxide is present.



3. DON'T BLOCK VENTILATION

- Make sure that vents, flues and chimneys aren't blocked.
- Clean flues and throat plates monthly.
- Chimneys should be swept at least once a year – or more often if used heavily.



4. KNOW THE SIGNS

- The six main symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning are headaches, dizziness, nausea, breathlessness, collapse and loss of consciousness.
- Another key indication that Carbon Monoxide may be the cause is if symptoms disappear or get better when you leave the home and come back when you return.
- Look out for sooting or staining on or around your appliance and for gas appliances burning with a lazy yellow or orange flame rather than a sharp blue one. Excessive condensation in the room where the appliance is installed is another sign.

IN AN EMERGENCY

IF YOUR ALARM GOES OFF OR YOU SPOT OTHER SIGNS OF CARBON MONOXIDE

- Open doors or windows for ventilation.
- Seek medical advice.
- Turn off all appliances and get them checked by a registered engineer.
- Call the relevant emergency advice line: Gas Emergency Service (24 hours) 0800 111 999; Solid Fuel Advice Line 0845 601 4406; Oil (OFTEC) 0845 658 5080.

IF YOU FEEL UNWELL

- Go to your GP, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (NHS 24 in Scotland on 08454 242424) or, if it is urgent, call 999 for an ambulance.

For more information about this campaign and about how to stay safe please visit www.co-bealarmed.co.uk

Spokespeople, materials for campaign supporters and information for the media are available through our campaign office: 020 7492 0999 or email campaign@co-bealarmed.co.uk

Published by the Energy Retail Association (ERA) on behalf of the Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance (COCAA) January 2010

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