



Carbon monoxide safety

Carbon monoxide, the silent killer

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a highly poisonous gas which is very difficult to detect because you can't taste, see or smell it.

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

CO is formed when there is not enough oxygen present to completely burn fossil fuels such as coal, gas, oil and wood. It can occur when appliances are faulty, not regularly serviced or if they are incorrectly fitted or used. It can also happen when flues and chimneys are blocked or poorly maintained.

This toxic, dangerous gas can also seep through walls, floors and ceilings, travelling from one neighbouring property to another.



Who is at risk?
Everyone, though some are more at risk than others.

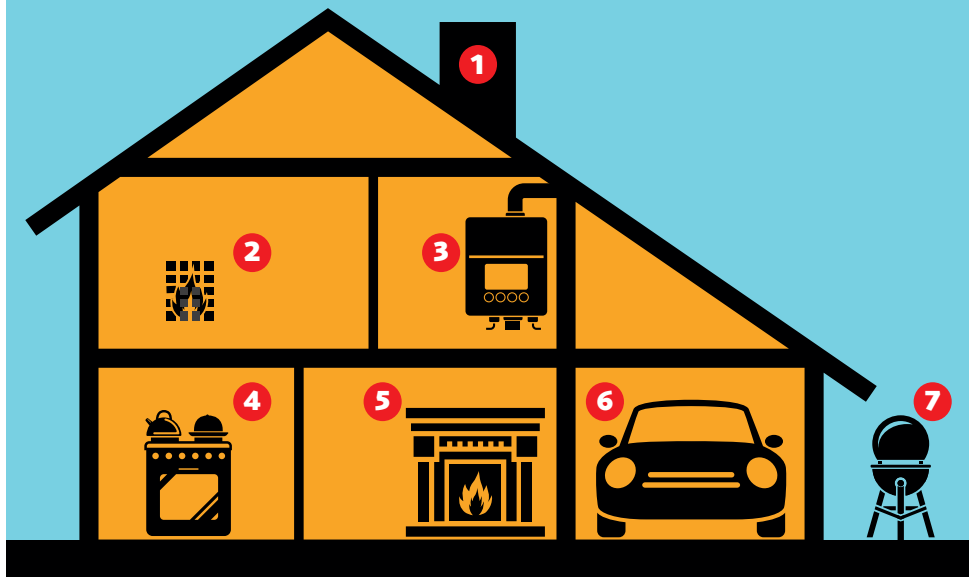
CO poisoning can affect everyone, but pregnant women, children, older people, or anyone with a chronic or long term illness can be more vulnerable. People who spend extended periods of time at home may also be at increased risk.

Smoking tobacco increases the CO content of your blood and can cause a build up of CO fumes indoors.

Remember

Pets can also be affected by CO poisoning.

Sources of CO in the home



CO CAN BE PRODUCED BY:

1. Blocked or poorly maintained chimneys or flues.
2. Portable heaters using liquid petroleum gas (LPG).
3. Gas boilers and appliances including fires.
4. Gas cookers or clay ovens.
5. Open fires (wood and coal burning).
6. Car engines and generators.
7. BBQs – charcoal or gas.

Remember

- Never take portable or disposable barbeques into your home or any confined space such as a tent or caravan.
- A smouldering BBQ can continue to produce CO for many hours afterwards.

Warning Signs



LOOK OUT FOR:

- yellow instead of blue flames coming from the gas appliance or flames that are not fully formed (e.g. if flame doesn't go all the way round a gas ring)
- black, sooty marks on the front covers of gas fires
- sooty or yellow/brown stains on or around boilers, stoves or fires
- pilot lights frequently blowing out
- increased condensation on the windows.

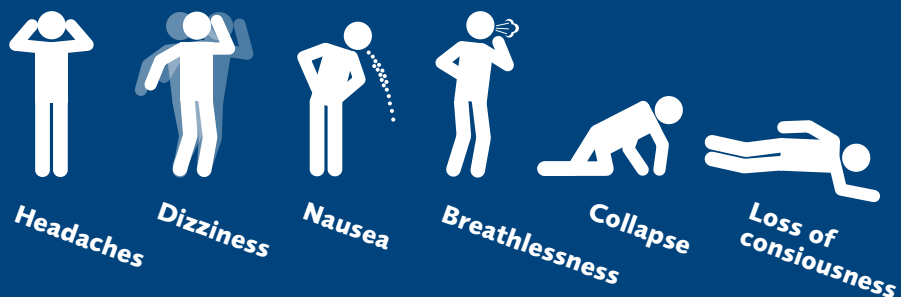
MAKE SURE THAT:

- your home has enough ventilation and airbricks are not blocked
- chimneys and flues are clean and free from blockages
- chimneys are swept regularly by a qualified sweep.

Remember

Engineers, technicians and chimney sweeps should always be registered under a competent registration scheme.

How to recognise symptoms of CO poisoning



Poisoning from CO can happen in a matter of minutes or over an extended period of time; it just depends on the amount of CO present.

It's easy to see why some of these symptoms can be mistaken for flu, food poisoning, tiredness or even a hangover!

EXAMPLES OF HIGH LEVEL CO EXPOSURE OVER A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME INCLUDE:

- breathlessness and chest pain
- seizures
- racing heart beat
- ataxia – a loss of co-ordination
- vertigo
- feelings of being intoxicated and confusion.
- loss of consciousness and death.

A SLOW BUILD UP OF CO OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME CAN LEAD TO SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS SUCH AS:

- headache
- tiredness
- confusion
- dizzy spells
- stomach pain
- nausea and vomiting
- shortness of breath and difficulty breathing
- paralysis
- death.

Remember

If symptoms only occur when you are in your home and disappear or get better when you leave CO may be present. Get a medical check up immediately.

What to do if you suspect CO poisoning



- Leave the property immediately.
- Seek medical attention as a priority. See your doctor or go to hospital and tell them that you suspect CO poisoning. They can do a blood or breath test to check.
- Before returning to your home call the 24 hour Gas Emergency Number on 0800 111 999.
You will be given safety advice, even if the suspected source is not a gas appliance. An engineer may need to inspect your appliances and flues to ensure they are safe to use.

Detection



Fit CO alarms in all rooms with fuel burning appliances and in all bedrooms. Ensure these can be heard throughout your home.

MAKE SURE YOUR HOME IS PROTECTED

- CO alarms should be bought from reputable DIY stores and supermarkets, or directly from most energy suppliers.
- Only buy alarms marked with the current British Standards BS EN 50291.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how and where to fit.
- Remember to test all of your alarms every month (Smoke, Heat and CO).

If you live in a private rented property, your landlord is bound by law to install a CO alarm in any room that contains a solid fuel burning appliance. However, LFB recommend that CO alarms should be fitted in all rooms with any fuel burning appliance, including gas appliances.

Remember

Most household CO alarms are portable so take yours with you when you go on holiday. CO alarms EN59291/2 are specifically designed for use in caravans, tents and houseboats.

Home fire safety visits



LFB staff can visit you at home and provide fire safety advice. This includes information on how to prevent a fire, means of detection and escape planning.

Free smoke alarms and specialist alarms can also be fitted where needed.

It's easy to book a visit, simply:

Freephone: **0800 028 4428**

Email: smokealarms@london-fire.gov.uk

Text/SMS: **07860 021 319**

MONEY WORRIES?

If you are concerned about the safety of your boiler or any other appliance or having difficulty with your fuel bills, contact your energy supplier. They may have schemes or grants to help or visit www.gov.uk/energy-company-obligation for more advice and information on what support is available.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

The Health and Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic

Gas Safe offers a free annual service reminder text.

www.staygassafe.co.uk

HETAS (biomass and solid fuel domestic heating appliances)

www.hetas.co.uk

OFTEC (for oil solid fuel and renewables)

www.oftec.org.uk



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