

## Reducing the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning from household appliances over winter

With the start of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week, the Health Protection Agency is today reminding people to have their fossil fuel and wood burning appliances - such as boilers, heaters and cookers - checked by an appropriately registered engineer before the winter sets in.

Professor Robert Maynard of the Health Protection Agency said: "Research shows that around 50 people die each year from accidental exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and many of these deaths take place between November and February due to faulty fossil fuel and wood burning appliances.

"To reduce the risk, it is vital that people ensure that their fossil fuel and wood burning appliances are regularly checked by an appropriately registered engineer. To minimise the risks, we recommend that people have these appliances checked before the start of winter."

In addition, the HPA is recommending that people buy a British Standards Kitemarked audible CO alarm. However, the installation of an alarm should not replace regular inspections by a registered engineer.

Gas Safe Register, which replaced the CORGI gas registration scheme across Great Britain and the Isle of Man on 1 April 2009, recommends that people fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm in their home and always take one on holiday with them.

Chief executive Peter Eldridge advises: "A CO alarm will alert you if there is carbon monoxide present, but this is no substitute for getting your appliances checked regularly." CO alarms can be bought from most DIY retailers.

Symptoms of CO poisoning include headaches, nausea / vomiting, drowsiness, dizziness, chest pains, collapse, loss of consciousness.

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### Notes to Editors

- Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas. However there are sometimes other indicators that may suggest a fault with domestic boilers or flues. The signs of trouble are black sooty marks on the radiants (bars above the gas flames) of gas fires, sooty marks on the wall around stoves, boilers or fires, smoke accumulating in rooms due to faulty flues. Yellow instead of blue flames from gas appliances is another sign that there may be a fault with the appliance (although this does not apply to fuel-effect, living-flame or decorative-flame gas fires as they are designed to look like flames from a solid fuel appliance). If you see any of these signs, turn off the appliance, open your windows and have an appropriately registered engineer service the appliance as soon as possible.

- Carbon monoxide poisoning reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood and so starves vital organs of oxygen. As more carbon monoxide is breathed in, less oxygen can be carried in the blood and symptoms worsen. Reversal of symptoms experienced by those mildly poisoned occurs on breathing non-contaminated air or through the provision of 100% oxygen.
- Further information on carbon monoxide can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.uk/HPA/Topics/ChemicalsAndPoisons/CompendiumOfChemicalHazard/1190384159840/>

Useful external links:

- National Gas Emergency Service - call 0800 111 999
- Gas Safe Register <http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk>
- Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) helpline - call 0845 65 85 080 or visit <http://www.oftec.org>
- Solid Fuel Association (SFA) helpline - call 0845 601 4406 or visit <http://www.solidfuel.co.uk/frame/main.html>