

Gas Appliances

Get them checked

Keep them safe!

Guidance and information on keeping your gas appliances and you safe.

What is the problem?

Every year in the UK about 14 people die from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues which have not been properly installed or maintained. Many others also suffer ill health. When gas does not burn properly, as with other fuels such as coal, wood or oil, excess carbon monoxide is produced, which is poisonous.

You can't see it. You can't taste it. You can't even smell it. But carbon monoxide can kill without warning in just a matter of hours. You are particularly at risk when you are asleep because you cannot recognise the early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

These include tiredness, drowsiness, headache, nausea, pains in the chest and stomach pains. These symptoms can mimic many common ailments and may easily be confused with flu or simple tiredness. If you or your family experience the above symptoms, and you believe carbon monoxide may be involved, **you must seek urgent medical advice**. Your doctor will need to test a blood or breath sample. Carbon monoxide quickly leaves the blood and **tests may be inaccurate if taken more than four hours after exposure has ended**.

When would I be at risk from carbon monoxide?

You are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if:

- your appliance was poorly installed
- your appliance is not working properly
- your appliance has not been checked for safety or maintained regularly
- there is not enough fresh air in the room
- your chimney or flue gets blocked up
- you allow an engineer who is not on the Gas Safe Register and is not competent in the area of work you require to install or maintain your appliance(s)

There is a particular risk if you sleep in a room where an appliance that is not of the room-sealed type (eg. a conventional gas fire) is left burning at night. (Flue outlets for room-sealed appliances are commonly located on an external wall and may be protected by a cage although more modern appliances may have a roof exit terminal.)

Certain types of appliances cannot be fitted in sleeping areas for this reason always check with a Gas Safe Registered Engineer. If in doubt as to which gas appliances are acceptable in these areas, please see gas safety and the law on page 3 of this information sheet for further guidance.

What should I do to keep safe?

ALL gas consumers are advised to have appliances checked for safety at least every **12 months** by a Gas Safe registered engineer. You should also read the manufacturer's instructions for recommendations on service and maintenance of your appliance(s) as certain types of appliance(s) may have specialist requirements.

What about Carbon Monoxide Alarms?

AUDIBLE CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS are a useful back-up precaution but must **NOT** be regarded as a substitute for proper installation and maintenance of gas equipment by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer. If you decide to buy a carbon monoxide alarm, ensure it meets current safety standards (BS EN 50291) and carries a British or European approval mark such as a CE or Kitemark. If in doubt ask a member of staff for advice. Always follow the manufacturer's siting, testing and maintenance instructions.

For further information on Carbon Monoxide Alarms please download the Gas Safety Information Sheet (GSIS-004) Advice and Information on the use of Carbon Monoxide Detectors.

Gas appliance safety

- **NEVER** use a gas appliance if you think it is not working properly. Signs to look out for include yellow or orange flames (except for some fuel-effect fires which are designed to display this colour flame check the manufacturers instructions to ensure safe operation of these units), soot or stains around the appliance and pilot lights which frequently blow out. Also look for signs of staining along voids where flues have been installed
- **NEVER** cover an appliance or block any of the vents
- **NEVER** block or obstruct any fixed ventilation grilles or air bricks
- **NEVER** block or cover outside flues

CAUTION

Whenever draught exclusion, ceiling or extraction fans, double glazing or conservatory extensions are fitted to a room containing a gas appliance, the appliance should subsequently be checked for safety. Increased condensation in rooms can also be a sign of poor combustion.

Gas safety and the law

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 place duties on gas consumers, installers, suppliers and landlords. These regulations link with other safety controls on combustion equipment, eg the Building Regulations, which also have standards for ventilation and flues. For your own protection remember:

- by law anyone carrying out work on gas appliances or fittings as part of their business must be competent and registered with the Gas Safe Register. Always check your engineer is registered by asking to see their ID card and checking their competence for the area of work that is required (see the following page on checking an engineer)
- by law only a competent person can carry out work on gas appliances or fittings. Do-it-yourself work on gas appliances or fittings could be dangerous and is likely to be illegal
- by law you must not use any gas appliance or fittings you know or suspect to be unsafe. Through Gas Safe Register, HSENI has asked all registered engineers to disconnect any gas appliance or fittings which are so dangerous as to be a threat to life if they are used. If your engineer asks your permission to disconnect such an appliance or fitting it will be in the interests of your own safety, and that of others, to agree. Before you use this appliance or fitting again, have it repaired by a Gas Safe registered engineer
- by law, landlords are generally responsible for making sure that gas fittings and flues are maintained in good order, and gas appliances and flues are checked for safety once in a period of 12 months. They must also keep a record of the safety checks for at least two years and issue the latest certificate to existing tenants and any new tenants before they move in. If you own the appliance, you are responsible for its maintenance and safety checks
- by law, with the exception of the room-sealed type, there are restrictions on the installation of gas appliances such as fires, boilers and heaters in sleeping accommodation. These restrictions apply only to appliances fitted after 1 January 1996 and to those already installed in rooms in rented accommodation which have been converted to bedrooms after 31 October 1998. Appliances which are not room-sealed, eg conventional gas fires of 14 kilowatts or less, may only be fitted if they have a device which automatically turns the gas supply off before a dangerous level of fumes can build up. However, for appliances above 14 kilowatts only those of a room-sealed type are allowed in such accommodation
- by law, since 31 October 1998, it has been illegal to install in any room instantaneous water heaters which are not room-sealed or fitted with a safety device which automatically turns the gas supply off before a dangerous level of poisonous fumes builds up
- by law, mains gas transporters/emergency service providers (ESPs) must, in the event of an emergency, make the situation safe. They should establish the cause of a gas escape and take action to prevent the gas from escaping within 12 hours (although the actual time for response in Northern Ireland is far less). In the case of actual or suspected escapes of carbon monoxide they should respond to reports from consumers and make the situation safe

Further information can be found in HSE's Approved Code of Practice on the Regulations 'L56 Safety in the Installation and use of Gas Systems and Appliances' which have been adopted by HSENI. This can be freely downloaded from our website at:

www.hсени.gov.uk/articles/gas

What actions do I take in an emergency?

What is an Emergency?

- A gas escape or smell of gas
- Smell of fumes
- Uncapped supply pipes
- Pipes not attached to meter
- Emergency control handle missing
- Meter box will not open
- Hanging meter - not supported
- Low gas pressure/No gas
- Meter stolen

If you smell gas, or suspect there is a gas escape, or a carbon monoxide leak, you should immediately do the following:

- Open all doors and windows
- DO NOT operate any electrical equipment or switches including the use of phones within the building if you need to call for assistance
- Shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve (if you know where it is and is safe to do so). If gas continues to escape call:

**Gas Emergency Freephone Number
0800 002 001**

(For Natural Gas supplies and installations)

- Make sure that any investigations or repairs are carried out by a Gas Safe Registered engineer

If you have a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) supply you must discuss emergency arrangements with your LPG supplier and agree what action to take in case of a gas escape or emission of carbon monoxide from any LPG appliance.

What preventative measures can I take against carbon monoxide exposure?

- Ensure that any work carried out in relation to gas appliances in domestic or commercial premises is to be undertaken by a Gas Safe Registered engineer, competent in that area of work
- HSENI strongly advises that gas appliances and/or flues are installed and serviced regularly for safety by a Gas Safe Registered engineer. If you live in rented accommodation, your landlord has a legal duty to carry out an annual gas safety check and maintain gas appliances. They must provide you with a copy of the completed gas safety check certificate
- Always make sure there is enough fresh air in the room containing your gas appliance. If you have a chimney or a flue, ensure it is not blocked up and also ensure that vents are not covered
- If you plan to install a gas fire in a bedroom, use a Gas Safe Registered engineer as there are legal requirements for installations in this area; do not use unflued appliances like gas cabinet heaters
- Get your chimney swept from top to bottom at least once a year by a qualified sweep
- If you have appliances that use other fossil fuels such as paraffin, seek advice from and make sure they are serviced and maintained by a competent person

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Early symptoms of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning can mimic many common ailments and may easily be confused with food poisoning, viral infections, flu or simple tiredness. Symptoms to look out for include:

- headaches
- breathlessness
- nausea
- dizziness
- collapse
- loss of consciousness
- tiredness
- drowsiness
- vomiting
- pains in the chest
- stomach pains
- erratic behaviour
- visual problems (blurred or impaired vision)

If you or your family experience any of the above symptoms and you believe Carbon Monoxide (CO) may be involved, you must seek urgent medical advice from either your GP or an accident and emergency department.

You should ask for a blood or breath test to confirm the presence of CO. Be aware, CO quickly leaves the blood and tests may be inaccurate if taken more than four hours after exposure has ceased.

What should I do if I think my appliance is leaking or spilling carbon monoxide?

- Switch off the appliance and do not reuse until remedial action has been taken. Shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve (if you know where it is). If you have a Natural Gas supply contact Northern Ireland Gas Emergency Freephone Number: **0800 002 001**
- If you have a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) supply then call your gas providers emergency number. You must discuss emergency arrangements with your LPG supplier and agree what action to take in case of a gas escape or emission of carbon monoxide from any LPG appliance
- Open all doors and windows to ventilate the room - do not sleep in it
- Visit your GP urgently and tell him/her that you believe your symptoms may be related to carbon monoxide poisoning and request either a blood and/or breath sample
- Contact a Gas Safe Registered engineer to carry out a safety check and make repairs

Further information

For more advice on using a Gas Safe Registered Installer you can go to the Gas Safe Register website at: www.gassaferegister.co.uk or by ringing: 0800 408 5500.

Free leaflets giving further advice on gas safety can be downloaded from the HSENI website: www.hсени.gov.uk

HSENI
83 Ladas Drive, Belfast BT6 9FR
Helpline: 0800 0320 121
Email: mail@hсени.gov.uk
Web: www.hсени.gov.uk