



COMMUNITY INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. 5

CARBON MONOXIDE

A number of tragic events in Northern Ireland involving Carbon Monoxide (CO) have led to a genuine increase in community concerns regarding the dangers of CO. The subsequent increase in the purchase of CO detection apparatus by the public has also seen a significant upsurge in CO incidents being reported to NIFRS.

What is Carbon Monoxide?

CO is an extremely poisonous and life threatening gas. It is a colourless, tasteless, odourless, non-irritating gas which is classified as a chemical asphyxiant. It is a by-product produced as a result of the incomplete combustion of carbon based fuels, ie, solid fuel, wood, gaseous fuels and liquid fuels due to poor ventilation or faulty equipment.

Toxic Effects of CO on the Human Body

When CO is breathed in, it is absorbed through the lungs and combines with the red blood cells in the body to form carboxyhaemoglobin; this reduces the ability for the blood to carry oxygen to the brain and main organs in the body. It is important to understand that CO may have different effects depending on the physical condition of the individual. Those at greater risk include the elderly, young children, people with anaemia, those with heart and lung conditions and pregnant women. Symptoms can feel like everyday illnesses and include tiredness, headaches, dizziness and nausea leading to breathlessness, collapse and loss of consciousness.

Important Information

All boilers and fuel burning appliances have the potential to produce CO and therefore it is important that they are serviced annually using a qualified engineer registered with the appropriate organisation.

- Gas Safe Register Tel: 0800 408 5500 www.gassaferegister.co.uk
- OFTEC (Oil) Tel: 0845 65 85 080 www.oftec.org
- NIACS (Chimney Sweeps) www.niacs.co.uk

For further CO advice contact HSENI Tel: 0800 0320 121 www.hseni.gov.uk/watchout

CO Alarm Information

A CO alarm is intended to warn of an accumulation of CO, enabling occupants to react before being exposed to significant risk. If a CO alarm activates it should not be considered an emergency situation requiring the Fire Service to attend unless lives are at risk.

Testing your CO alarm

Every alarm is different, so follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding frequency of testing. You should press the 'Test' button on each CO detector to ensure it is working. For a few seconds it will emit a high-pitched, loud beeping, usually louder than a smoke detector.

HSENI and NIFRS advice, should your alarm activate or you suspect the presence of CO, is to isolate all possible sources, ventilate the property and get out. Call your qualified registered engineer to determine if there has been a leak of CO. **Remember TASK**

- T** – Turn off or extinguish all fuel burning appliances if safe to do so.
- A** – Air - Open all doors and windows to increase ventilation in the property and go outside and stay out in clean fresh air.
- S** – Seek medical assistance if you feel unwell. Go to your GP or nearest Accident and Emergency. For medical emergencies call 999 and ask for an ambulance.
- K** – Keep all appliances turned off until checked by a qualified registered engineer.

Emergency Information

For a CO emergency where the occupants' lives are at risk call 999 and ask for an ambulance and the Fire & Rescue Service. In this instance Get out, Stay out and get the Fire and Rescue Service out.

For further information phone NIFRS HQ 028 9266 4221 or visit www.nifrs.org



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