

Gas appliances

Get them checked. Keep them safe



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The problem

Every year about 20 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.

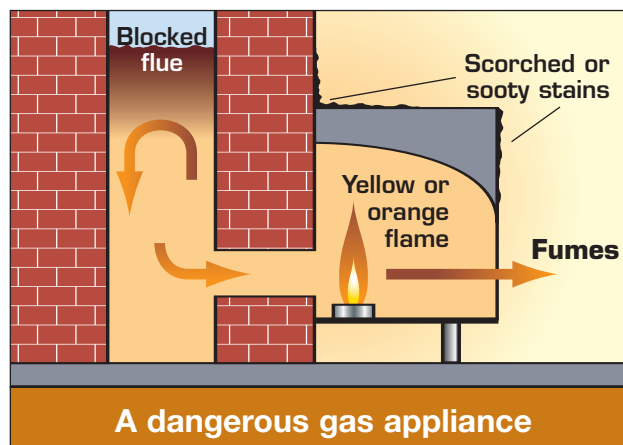
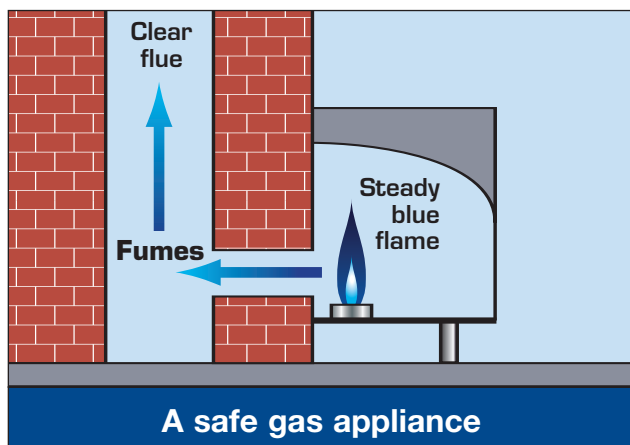
You are particularly at risk when you are asleep because you cannot recognise the early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. These include tiredness, drowsiness, headache, nausea, pains in the chest and stomach pains. These symptoms can mimic many common ailments and may easily be confused with flu 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**.

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 non-CORGI-registered engineers 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 at a low level protected by a cage rather than at or above roof level.)



The answers

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 fuel-effect fires which display this colour flame), soot or stains around the appliance and pilot lights which frequently blow out.

NEVER cover an appliance or block the convection air 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.

ALL gas consumers are advised to have appliances checked for safety **at least every 12 months** by a CORGI-registered installer.

You could be entitled to a free safety check. If you are over 60, chronically sick, disabled, deaf or hearing-impaired, blind or visually impaired, you are entitled to join your supplier's Priority Service Register. It is free to join and once a member you are entitled, among other things, to a free annual gas safety check (unless you live in rented accommodation where it is your landlord's duty to ensure the check is done). For more information look at the back of your gas bill.

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 CORGI-registered installer. If you decide to buy a carbon monoxide alarm, ensure it meets current safety standards (BS 7860 or BS EN 50291) and carries the Kitemark. If in doubt ask a member of staff for advice. Always follow the manufacturer's siting instructions.

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

- Open all doors and windows.
- Shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve (if you know where it is). If gas continues to escape call **National Grid** on the **Gas Emergency Freephone Number 0800 111 999**.
- In the case of suspected carbon monoxide leakage, follow the above procedure, except if you are able to identify the specific appliance at fault. In this case you should consult a CORGI-registered installer to investigate and make repairs.

The law

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 place duties on gas consumers, installers, suppliers and landlords. These regulations link with other safety controls on combustion equipment, eg the Building Regulations, which are 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 CORGI Gas Registration.** Always check your installer is registered by asking to see their current CORGI photo ID card which has a photo of the installer, their CORGI registration number, their trading title and the expiry date of the card. The reverse of the card details what kind of gas work the installer is able to do. You can also call CORGI during normal office hours on 0800 915 0485 or log on to the CORGI website on www.trustcorgi.com/consumers.htm;
- **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 CORGI, HSE has asked all registered installers to disconnect any gas appliance or fittings which are so dangerous as to be a threat to life if they are used. If your installer 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 CORGI-registered installer;
- **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. In the case of actual or suspected escapes of carbon monoxide they should respond to reports from consumers and make the situation safe.

Further reading

If you would like more detailed information on the subject, you will find the following HSE publication useful: *Safety in the installation and use of gas systems and appliances. Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L56* (Second edition) HSE Books 1998 ISBN 978 0 7176 1635 0.

Also, for safety information on gas, solid fuel and oil burning appliances, and information on the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, look at the Department of Health booklet *Keep warm keep well: A winter guide* (updated annually). Download it from www.dh.gov.uk or write to DH Publications, PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH, Tel: 0870 155 5455.

Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995 Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk (HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk.)

British Standards are available from BSI Customer Services, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL Tel: 020 8996 9001 Fax: 020 8996 7001 Website: www.bsi-global.com

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

HSE's Gas Safety website: www.hse.gov.uk/gas/index.htm

HSE Gas Safety Advice Line Tel: 0800 300 363

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.

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