

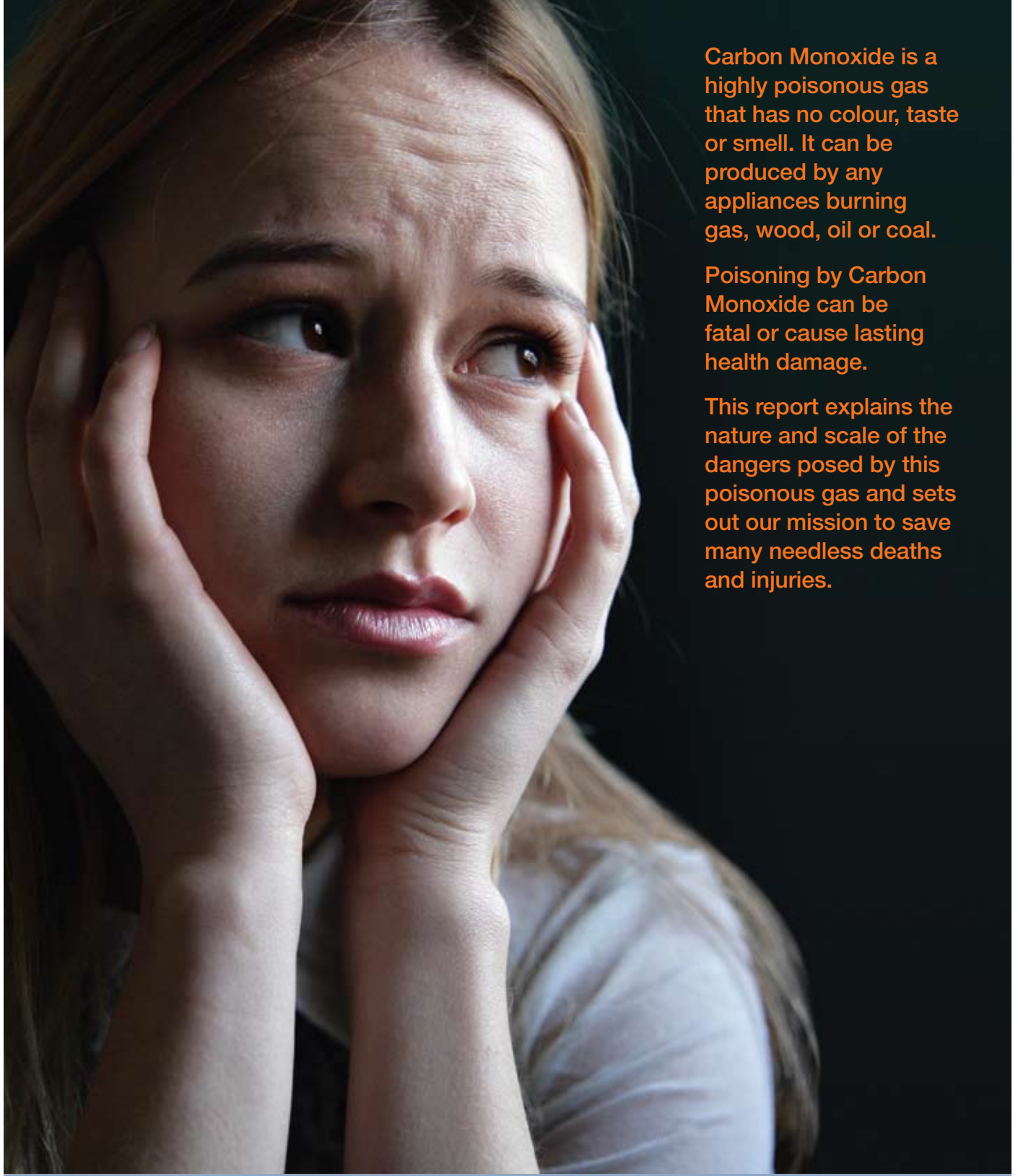
Carbon Monoxide – Be Alarmed!



Carbon Monoxide is a highly poisonous gas that has no colour, taste or smell. It can be produced by any appliances burning gas, wood, oil or coal.

Poisoning by Carbon Monoxide can be fatal or cause lasting health damage.

This report explains the nature and scale of the dangers posed by this poisonous gas and sets out our mission to save many needless deaths and injuries.



This campaign is supported by the Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance (COCAA) whose members include victims' charities, professional organisations and energy companies.



What needs to be done?

As well as raising awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and the precautions people should take, this campaign is seeking support for four changes which will make a major difference.

1. In order to receive a gas safety certificate, landlords must provide tenants with a Carbon Monoxide alarm.

This is a simple mechanism to ensure that many of the most vulnerable members of society are offered the protection of a Carbon Monoxide alarm. The existing legal requirement for a gas safety certificate only means that an appropriately qualified and registered installer checks the safety of gas appliances.

2. Every new home should be fitted with a wired-in Carbon Monoxide alarm.

To mirror the current requirement for a wired-in smoke alarm to be fitted in all new-build homes, Building Regulations should be amended to require an audible wired-in Carbon Monoxide alarm to be installed. This is a simple measure which will add no significant cost to homebuilders if the Carbon Monoxide alarm is installed at the same time as the smoke alarm.

3. The Government should nominate a Minister to take the lead, across Whitehall, on issues relating to Carbon Monoxide.

Responsibility for Carbon Monoxide related issues currently lies across several departments and Ministers. A single Minister to co-ordinate activity would ensure that policy relating to Carbon Monoxide, including housing, training for healthcare professionals and recording of statistics, is co-ordinated.

4. There should be more training and information to ensure that front-line healthcare professionals can recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning and record accurate data around incidents and deaths.

Too often, the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning are not recognised and people are allowed to continue living in a dangerous environment. We call upon the professional organisations for healthcare professionals including GPs, pharmacists and paramedics to work with the Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance to agree an action plan to address this issue.

Why be alarmed?

Too many people in the UK die or become seriously ill from Carbon Monoxide poisoning – incidents that could be prevented if they had greater awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide, had their appliances serviced regularly and fitted an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm.

Carbon Monoxide, even at levels that do not kill, can cause serious harm to health if breathed in over a long period¹. In extreme cases paralysis and brain damage can be caused.

Whether using gas, oil or solid fuel, all fuel-burning appliances – including stoves, fires, boilers and water heaters – are capable of producing Carbon Monoxide if not appropriately installed and maintained. As you can't smell, see or taste Carbon Monoxide, an audible alarm is essential for further protection.

As finances are squeezed in the current economic climate, there is a significant risk that householders will cut further corners on maintaining their appliances, unwittingly increasing the dangers for themselves and their families.



Katherine died along with her two grandsons after a gas boiler was incorrectly installed by an unqualified engineer. Her daughter and a friend were left with permanent brain damage.

The scale of the problem

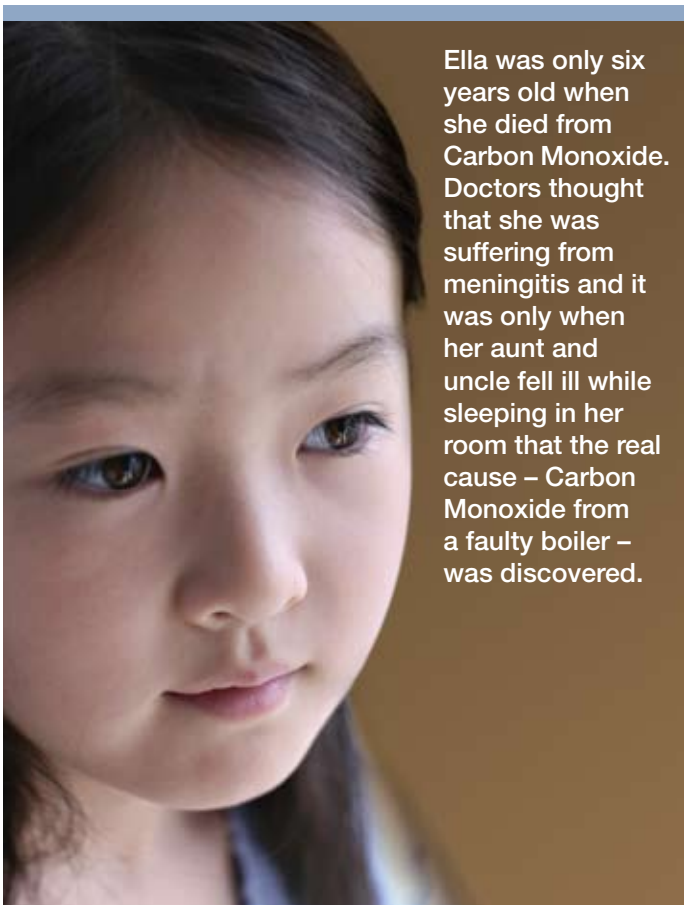
There are around 30 confirmed deaths each year from Carbon Monoxide poisoning but unfortunately this is just the tip of the iceberg. There is no co-ordinated system for recording incidents, so any figures collated at a national level inevitably provide only a partial picture of the problem. The situation is further confused by the similarity between the early symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning (including headaches, nausea and tiredness) and those of illnesses such as flu.

A more realistic assessment of the scale of the problem is revealed by new research² which found that nearly **one person in thirty surveyed believed that they had suffered from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.**

Servicing appliances

All fuel-burning appliances should be checked annually by a registered and qualified engineer who is familiar with the appliance. Only half of people claim to do this², suggesting that **some 12 million households are at risk because of this.** Nearly a quarter of people never have their appliances checked or don't know when they were last checked.

Even those people who believe they are taking the necessary measures may be mistaken, with industry research³ suggesting that up to half of all work on appliances is carried out illegally by unqualified and unregistered engineers.



Ella was only six years old when she died from Carbon Monoxide. Doctors thought that she was suffering from meningitis and it was only when her aunt and uncle fell ill while sleeping in her room that the real cause – Carbon Monoxide from a faulty boiler – was discovered.

Having an audible alarm

Millions of people are also putting themselves at risk by not having an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm in their home. Although 38% of people claim that they have one², other research⁴ suggests that the true figure is much lower (in the order of 25-30%).

The most common reason for not having an alarm is that people have never considered Carbon Monoxide a risk, followed by not knowing where to get one and being concerned about the cost. However, the cost of Carbon Monoxide alarms has dropped significantly in recent years to around £15 and can be purchased at DIY stores and some supermarkets or can be bought directly from many energy suppliers.

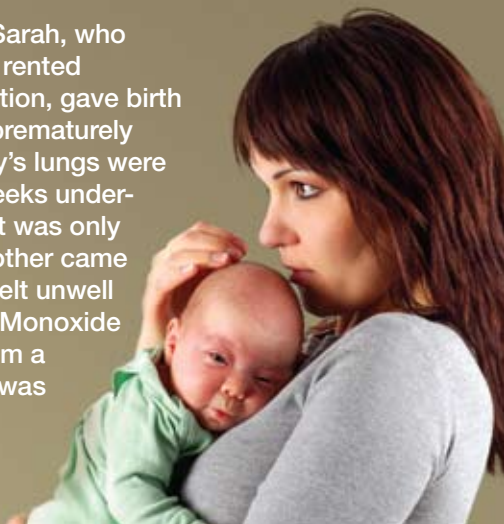
Only by taking both precautions of having an alarm and regularly servicing appliances will homes be protected. Only 22% of people say that they do both of these², leaving in the order of **20 million households or 47 million people in the UK under-protected** and at risk of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

Knowing the symptoms

Knowing the symptoms is your last line of defence, but the figures are worrying, **with only 6% of people very confident that they would recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning**. Surprisingly, nearly a quarter of people don't realise that you can actually die from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

There is also anecdotal evidence that suggests even healthcare professionals such as GPs, pharmacists and paramedics find it difficult to recognise the symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

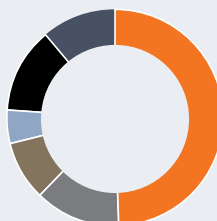
21 year old Sarah, who was living in rented accommodation, gave birth four weeks prematurely and her baby's lungs were another 8 weeks under-developed. It was only when her mother came to stay and felt unwell that Carbon Monoxide exposure from a faulty boiler was identified as the cause.



Key facts

- Some 20 million households or 47 million people don't have an alarm or don't have their appliances serviced often enough.
- Nearly one person in thirty surveyed believed that they had suffered from Carbon Monoxide poisoning.
- Only 6% of people are very confident that they would recognise the symptoms of poisoning.
- Young people and the elderly are particularly at risk.

When was the last time you had your heating and cooking appliances checked by a registered/qualified installer/engineer?



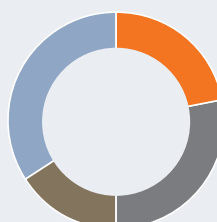
- 50% In the last 12 months
- 13% More than 12 months ago but within the last 2 years
- 9% More than 2 years ago but within 5 years
- 5% More than 5 years ago
- 13% Never
- 10% Don't know

Do you have an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm?



- 38% Yes
- 62% No

Precautions taken



- 22% Both regular servicing of appliances and an audible alarm
- 28% Regular servicing of appliances only
- 16% Audible alarm only
- 34% Neither

We're all at risk



Anyone can be affected by Carbon Monoxide poisoning and we are all at risk if we use appliances burning gas, wood, oil or coal – or our neighbours do, as Carbon Monoxide can seep through walls.

The likelihood of incidents occurring in any particular area depends upon many factors, including the type of housing; whether the home is owned or rented; the number of householders without English as a first language; and the ability and inclination of people to pay for new appliances, servicing and alarms.

People living in rented accommodation may be at higher risk as they are often not responsible for the purchase or maintenance of their appliances. Many tenants are not fully aware of their rights when it comes to demanding annual servicing of appliances and ensuring they have a current gas safety certificate. It is also very important that tenants allow engineers access to their home as refusing means they are putting both themselves and their neighbours at risk.

Those living in non-English speaking communities or with a poor understanding of English themselves can be at greater risk because of difficulties in understanding the information on the issue and a lack of awareness of the measures they should be taking to protect themselves.

Young children and elderly people are particularly at risk from Carbon Monoxide poisoning because their bodies are less able to withstand the effects of Carbon Monoxide poisoning (half of those killed are aged under 12 or over 60). The elderly are also more at risk because they are more likely to use older appliances and have a lower awareness of the potential danger.

1 Health and Safety Executive

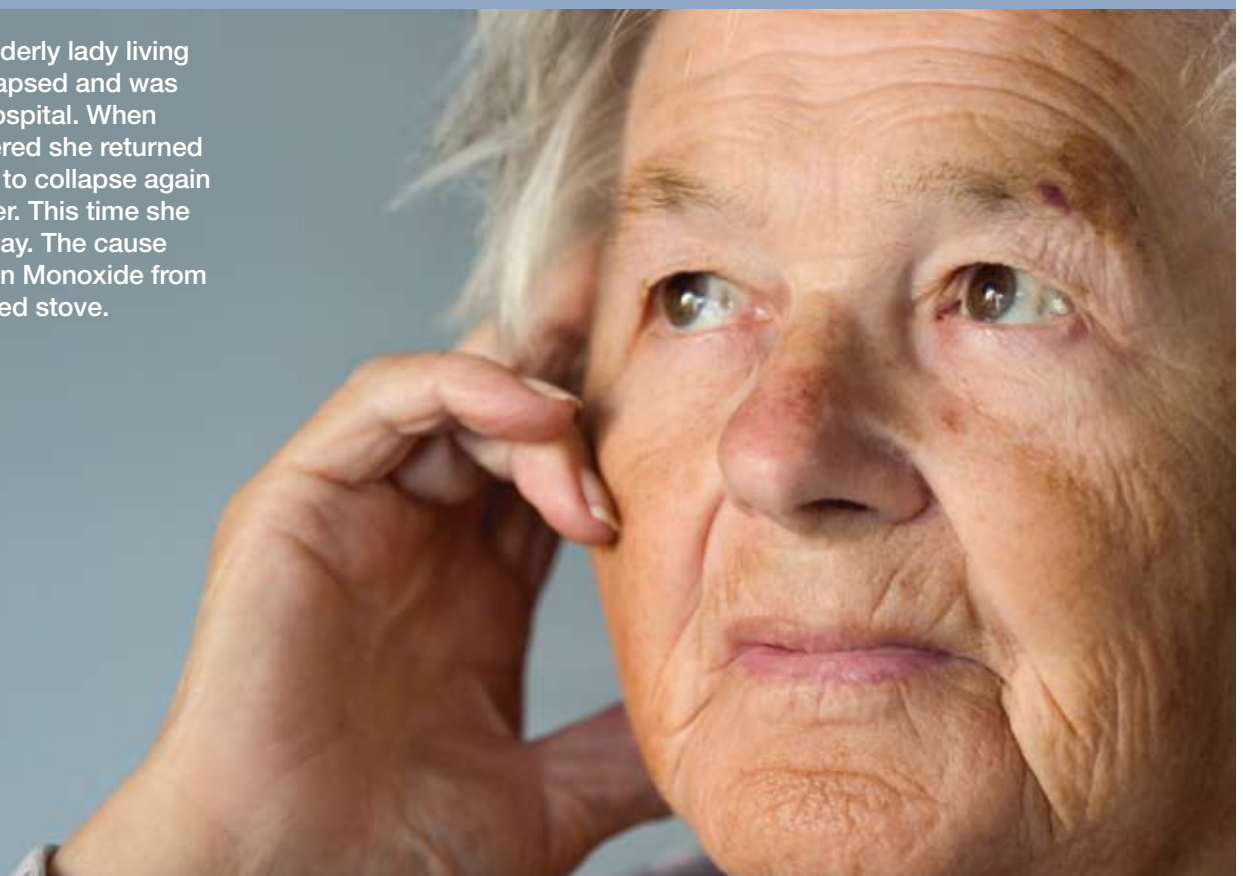
2 YouGov survey of 4,332 adults, September 2008

3 CORGI Carbon Monoxide reports 2007 and 2008

4 CoGDEM (Council for Gas Detection and Environmental Monitoring)

All the case studies featured are true stories but the names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Mary, an elderly lady living alone, collapsed and was taken to hospital. When she recovered she returned home only to collapse again a week later. This time she passed away. The cause was Carbon Monoxide from her coal fired stove.



Three steps to keep your household safe

Fit an audible alarm

- Alarms can be bought from many DIY stores, some supermarkets and from most energy suppliers for as little as £15. If you are a tenant, your landlord may provide you with one. Elderly people can also obtain free alarms from organisations such as Help the Aged.

Service your appliances

- Have all your fuel-burning appliances serviced annually by a professional registered with the appropriate organisation for the fuel type.
- If you live in rented accommodation with gas appliances your landlord must provide you with proof that a CORGI registered installer has serviced the appliances within the last 12 months.
- If you have a solid fuel appliance and use it regularly, empty and check the ash can daily, and clean the flue and throat plates monthly. Chimneys should be swept at least once a year, or if used daily should be swept at least twice a year.

Know the signs

- The symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning can include nausea, dizziness, tiredness, headaches, loss of balance or forgetfulness.
- Look out for sooting or staining on or around your appliance and for gas appliances burning with a lazy yellow or orange flame rather than a blue one. Excessive condensation in the room where the appliance is installed is another sign.

In an emergency

If your alarm goes off or you spot other signs of Carbon Monoxide

- Open doors or windows for ventilation.
- Call the relevant emergency advice line: **Gas Emergency Service (24 hours) 0800 111 999;**
Solid fuels (HETAS) 0845 634 5626; Oil (OFTEC) 0845 658 5080.
- Seek medical advice.
- Have all appliances serviced and checked. Do not use them until you're told it's safe to do so.

If you feel unwell

- Go to your GP, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or, if it is urgent, call 999 for an ambulance.

For more information about this campaign and about how to stay safe please visit www.CO-BeAlarmed.co.uk

Spokespeople and information for the media are available through our press office: 020 7492 0999 or email press@CO-BeAlarmed.co.uk

