



Carbon monoxide safety

Information and advice guide



Introduction

This leaflet gives information and advice about carbon monoxide gas (CO), what it is, where it can leak from in the home, CO poisoning and the symptoms, what to look out for, what to do if you suspect a CO leak and how to minimise the risks.

Two Rivers Housing services your gas, oil and solid fuel appliances annually. This is to help make sure they are working properly, efficiently and are safe to use. We have also fitted hard-wired CO detectors, with battery back-up, in your home if it has gas or solid fuel appliances.

It is vitally important we check and service these appliances as they can leak this dangerous and poisonous gas if they are not well maintained.

What is carbon monoxide?

CO is a poisonous gas that has no smell, taste or colour. It is often referred to as 'the silent killer' and breathing it in can lead to serious long-term health problems, such as brain damage. It can also be fatal.

Where can it come from?

Household appliances, such as gas fires, boilers, central heating systems and cookers which use gas or a solid fuel, can release CO gas when the fuel does not burn fully.



This happens when a gas appliance has been incorrectly fitted, badly repaired or poorly maintained. It can also occur if flues, chimneys or vents are blocked.

Please note: We will not be safety-checking any appliances that you have installed, such as gas cookers. It is important to have these professionally fitted and regularly inspected to make sure they are safe.

We had a case where a tenant became very ill as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning, caused by a faulty cooker which was causing a build up of Carbon Monoxide (CO) gas in her home due to not burning the gas fully. Fortunately she sought medical help in time, the faulty appliance was replaced and she made a full recovery.

Carbon monoxide poisoning and the symptoms

CO poisoning occurs when you breathe in the gas and it replaces oxygen in your bloodstream. Without oxygen, your body tissue and cells die. Even small amounts of the gas can cause CO poisoning, and long-term effects can include paralysis and brain damage.



CO symptoms are very similar to those of the flu, a hangover, food poisoning or a viral infection. It is quite common for people to mistake this very dangerous poisoning for something else.

Remember the main symptoms to look out for:

1. Headaches
2. Nausea
3. Breathlessness
4. Collapse
5. Dizziness
6. Loss of consciousness

Being aware of the symptoms could save your life.

Other signs that could indicate CO poisoning

- Your symptoms only occur when you are at home and seem to disappear when you leave home.
- Others in your household (including pets) are experiencing similar symptoms at a similar time.

What to do if you suspect CO poisoning

- Get fresh air immediately. Open doors and windows, turn off gas and/or oil appliances, shut the vents on any solid fuel appliances and leave the house.
- See your doctor immediately or go to hospital. Let them know you suspect CO poisoning. They can do a blood or breath test to check.
- If you think there is an immediate danger, call the Gas Emergency Helpline on 0800 111 999.
- Ask Two Rivers Housing to inspect your gas/oil or solid fuel appliances, flues and chimney to see if there is a problem.

The warning signs of a CO leak

Any of the following could be a sign of CO in your home:

- Flames of a lazy yellow or orange colour on your gas hob, rather than being a crisp blue.
- Dark staining on/around appliances.
- Pilot lights that frequently blow out.
- Increased condensation inside windows.
- Signs of soot around the solid fuel fire or boiler.

Faulty appliances, flues and/or a blocked chimney can lead to CO poisoning. We will regularly service your gas and solid fuel appliances **free of charge** to help to prevent any problems.

For your own safety, and that of those around you, please let us make this essential appointment and allow us/our registered contractors to access your home to carry out the service.

Minimising the risks

The first and best thing you can do to minimise the risks is to make sure your gas/oil or solid fuel appliances are safety-checked annually by a Two Rivers Housing contractor. They will be a suitably competent and qualified Gas Safe-registered engineer, OFTEC and HETAS-approved.

We have installed an audible CO and heat alarm in all properties with gas/oil or solid fuel appliances. We have also made sure all alarms installed in your home are marked EN 50291 and bear the British Standards kitemark. The CO alarm will activate in the presence of CO which may cause the other alarms in the property to also activate as most are now linked. It's a good second line of defence, but these alarms will only sound when something has already gone wrong.

Flues, chimneys and air vents

These all play an important role in the safe operation of gas/oil and solid fuel appliances, allowing products of combustion to escape and providing a high level of ventilation. As cold as it might get during the winter, never block up these airways. This could result in a dangerous build-up of CO in your home.

Chimneys will need to be checked and swept (if solid fuel) every year for blockages (such as birds' nests, debris and carbon deposits) which can prevent dangerous fumes from escaping.

The Gas Safe-registered engineer and HETAS engineer will be on the look-out for signs of blockages.

What is involved in an appliance safety check?

As a minimum, an appliance safety check includes all the checks and tests to ensure the appliance is safe to operate, for example:

- It is correctly set and adjusted to ensure the gas/oil and solid fuel is burning correctly.
- It is of a type suitable for the room in which it is located.
- It is physically stable, securely-fitted and properly connected to the chimney or flue.

- There is an adequate and permanent air supply suitable for the type of appliance installed.
- Any flues or chimneys are operating correctly.
- All safety devices function correctly.

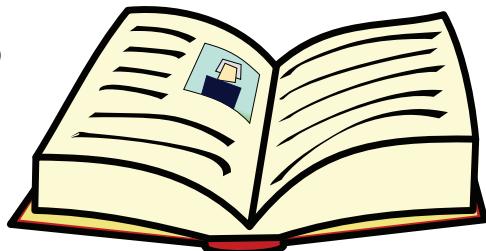
What is an appliance service?

An appliance service includes all the checks listed above, and any other specific checks for inspection and/or cleaning of the appliance, as specified and detailed in the appliance manufacturer's instructions. These may include:

- An analysis of the combustion exhaust gases to make sure the appliance is burning the gas and oil safely (if appropriate).
- A check of the condition of the appliance including (but not limited to) the effectiveness of any seals and gaskets, the cleanliness of heat exchangers etc, and checking for any signs of heat or other distress.

This is not an exhaustive list and servicing requirements will vary across appliance types and models.

Please note: Some appliance servicing regimes provide an interim performance check (which is annual) and is carried out in order to determine the degree of dismantling the appliance that is required, as well as the level of servicing.



What is a gas/oil installation safety check?

If a gas installation safety check (which covers all appliances and internal pipework) is required or specified, each appliance will need to be checked as outlined above and, in addition:

- All accessible gas pipework will be visually inspected to make sure the installation and storage tank are in good condition.
- The gas/oil pipework will be tested to make sure there are no gas/oil leaks.

Danielle's story - Why Danielle will always be gas safety vigilant.
When Danielle's baby was two weeks old, the boiler broke down. The family had no heating and hot water. There had been no boiler maintenance or gas safety check since the family moved into the house 18 months before, and there were no carbon monoxide (CO) alarms had been installed.

When the emergency engineer visited the home, he found the boiler had been in a state of disrepair for some time. It had been leaking into the ceiling, but the family had not seen the water damage because it was concealed by a high wardrobe with things piled on top. When the packages on top of the wardrobe were removed, they saw the huge brown stain.

The engineer was surprised that the boiler had not broken down sooner as it was likely to have been leaking CO for some time. The only reason the family had not experienced any symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning was because the boiler was in the loft.

"I was faced with the realisation that I might have been poisoning my babies, due to my own negligence. It was too much," said Danielle.

The family immediately ordered two CO alarms and started gathering quotes for a new boiler. The new boiler is regularly serviced with a Gas Safe-registered engineer and the family is a lot more vigilant when it comes to safety around its gas appliances.

Don't take any chances. We will arrange for all Two Rivers Housing appliances and chimneys or flues to be serviced annually. All appliances personally owned, you should arrange to be checked by a relevantly qualified engineer.

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