



HEREFORD & WORCESTER
HWFR
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Carbon Monoxide Safety:

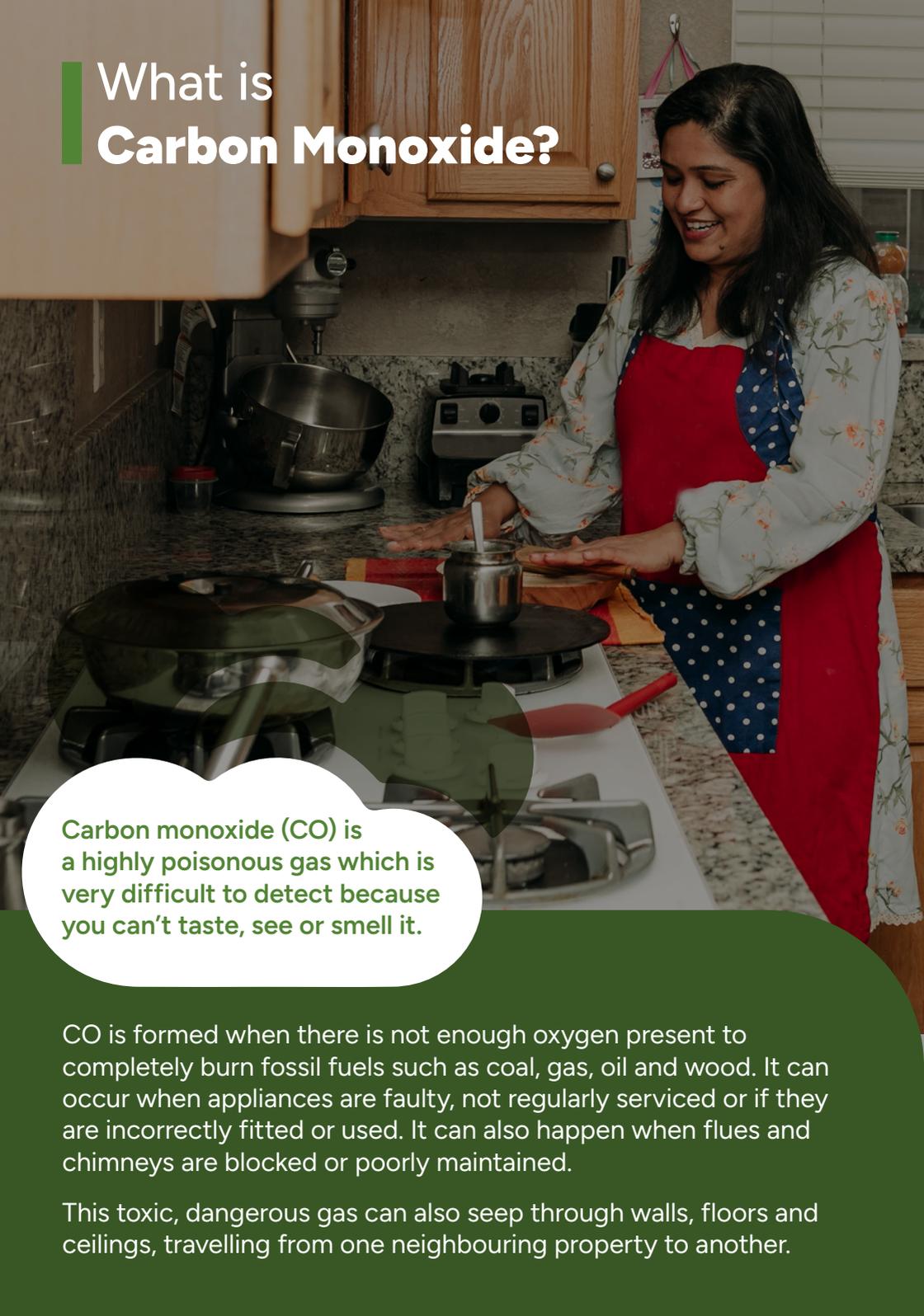
The Silent Killer

www.hwfire.org.uk



PREVENTION

What is Carbon Monoxide?

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored floral long-sleeved shirt and a red apron with a blue polka-dot pattern, is smiling and looking down at a small stainless steel pot on a gas stove. She has her hands near the pot. The kitchen has wooden cabinets, a granite countertop, and a stainless steel mixer. A red spatula is on the counter next to the stove. The background shows a window with white blinds and a pink bag hanging on the wall.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a highly poisonous gas which is very difficult to detect because you can't taste, see or smell it.

CO is formed when there is not enough oxygen present to completely burn fossil fuels such as coal, gas, oil and wood. It can occur when appliances are faulty, not regularly serviced or if they are incorrectly fitted or used. It can also happen when flues and chimneys are blocked or poorly maintained.

This toxic, dangerous gas can also seep through walls, floors and ceilings, travelling from one neighbouring property to another.

Who is at risk?



Everyone, though
some are more at risk
than others.

CO poisoning can affect everyone, but pregnant women, children, older people, or anyone with a chronic or long term illness can be more vulnerable. People who spend extended periods of time at home may also be at increased risk.

Smoking tobacco increases the CO content of your blood and can cause a build-up of fumes indoors.



Remember:

Pets can also be
affected by CO
poisoning.

Sources of CO in the home

CO can be produced by:



Blocked or poorly maintained chimneys or flues.



Portable heaters using liquid petroleum gas (LPG).



Gas boilers and appliances including fires.



Gas cookers or clay ovens.



Open fires (wood and coal burning).



Car engines and generators.



BBQs – charcoal or gas.

Warning Signs

Look out for:

- Yellow instead of blue flames coming from the gas appliance or flames that are not fully formed (e.g. if flame doesn't go all the way round a gas ring).
- Black sooty mark on the front covers of gas fires.
- Sooty or yellow / brown stains on or around boilers, stoves or fires.
- Pilot lights frequently blowing out.
- Increased condensation on the windows.

Make Sure That:

- 🔧 Your home has enough ventilation and airbricks are not blocked.
- 🔧 Chimneys and flues are clean and free from blockages.
- 🔧 Chimneys are swept regularly by a qualified sweep.

Remember:

- ➔ Don't take portable or disposable barbecues into your home or any confined space such as a tent or caravan.
- ➔ A smouldering BBQ can continue to produce CO for many hours afterwards.

Detection

Fit CO alarms in all rooms with fuel burning appliances and in all bedrooms. Ensure these can be heard throughout your home.

Make sure your home is protected:

- 🔧 Alarms should be bought from reputable DIY stores and supermarkets, or directly from most energy suppliers.
- 🔧 Only buy alarms marked with the current British Standards BS EN 50291.

! Remember

Engineers, technicians and chimney sweeps should always be registered under a competent registration scheme.

- 🔧 Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how and where to fit.
- 🔧 Remember to test all your alarms every month (Smoke, Heat and CO).
- 🔧 If you live in a private rented property, your landlord is bound by law to install a CO alarm in any room that contains a solid fuel burning appliance. However, HWFRS recommend that CO alarms should be fitted in all rooms with any fuel burning appliance, including gas appliances.



How to recognise symptoms of CO poisoning

Poisoning from CO can happen in a matter of minutes or over an extended period of time; it just depends on the amount of CO present.

It's easy to see why some of these symptoms can be mistaken for flu, food poisoning, tiredness or even a hangover!

A slow build up of CO over a long period of time can lead to serious health problems such as:



Headache



Tiredness



Confusion



Dizzy spells



Stomach pain



Nausea and
vomiting



Shortness of breath
and difficulty
breathing



Paralysis



Death

Examples of high level CO exposure over a short period of time include:



Breathlessness
and chest pain



Seizure



Racing heart
beat



Ataxia –
a loss of
co-ordination



Vertigo



Feelings of being
intoxicated and
confusion



Loss of
consciousness
and death

! Remember

If symptoms only occur when you are in your home and disappear or get better when you leave CO may be present. Get a medical check-up immediately.

What to do if you suspect CO poisoning

Leave the property immediately.

Seek medical attention as a priority. See your doctor or go to hospital and tell them that you suspect CO poisoning. They can do a blood or breath test to check.

Before returning to your home call the 24 hour Gas Emergency Number on 0800 111 999. You will be given safety advice, even if the suspected source is not a gas appliance. An engineer may need to inspect your appliances and flues to ensure they are safe to use.



PREVENTION

Home Fire Safety Visit

HWFRS staff can visit you at home and provide free safety advice. This includes information on how to prevent a fire, means of detection and escape planning.

Free smoke alarms and specialist alarms can also be fitted where needed. It's easy to book a visit, simply:

Freephone:

0800 0321155

Email:

safeandwell@hwfire.org.uk

Further Information and Contacts

HETAS (biomass and solid fuel domestic heating appliances):

www.hetas.co.uk

The Health and Safety Executive:

www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic

OFTEC (for oil solid fuel and renewables):

www.oftec.org.uk

Gas Safe offers a free annual service reminder text:

www.staygassafe.co.uk



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