

# Danger - carbon monoxide poisoning

## Solid Fuel, Wood and Oil Burning Appliances:

- get them checked
- sweep your chimneys
- and be safe.

## The Problem

Heating and cooking appliances fuelled by coal, smokeless fuels, wood and oil can be just as likely as gas appliances to cause carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning if they are poorly installed, faulty or incorrectly used. CO poisoning is mostly caused by inadequate ventilation or a lack of correct maintenance of appliances, flues and chimneys. Some incidents are also due to incorrect installation or deterioration of the structure of the chimney. Poisonous CO gas is produced when fuel does not burn properly. You can die from CO poisoning, or your health can be permanently damaged.

CO gas is odourless and tasteless, so you won't know when it is present. It can kill or maim without warning in a matter of hours. You are particularly vulnerable when you are asleep. The elderly and the young are particularly at risk.

The early symptoms of CO poisoning include - tiredness, drowsiness, headache, dizziness, chest pains and nausea.

## Make sure you are not at risk of CO poisoning

- **DO ...**
  - have your appliances installed and regularly checked and maintained for safety by a competent engineer;
  - empty ash from a solid fuel appliance regularly, as the fire may not burn properly and this may also damage the appliance;
  - have your chimneys swept very regularly (at least once a year), even if you burn smokeless fuel;
  - have your chimneys swept after any prolonged period when the appliance has not been in use;
  - clean the appliance flueways monthly and have flue pipes connecting appliances to chimneys swept regularly, in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction.
- **DO NOT ...**
  - use the wrong fuel for your appliance;
  - allow non-competent people to install or maintain your appliance or sweep your chimney;

- block or obstruct ventilation grilles or air bricks which provide fixed air paths;
- block or obstruct flue outlets or chimneys;
- cover an appliance or block the hot air outlets;
- use your appliance if you think that it or its chimney is not working properly. Signs to look out for are fumes or smoke in the house, slower than usual burning, evidence of sooting, difficulty in lighting, and staining around the appliance casing, *particularly if you are suffering from any of the symptoms mentioned.*

## Further Information

- **All fossil fuels:**  
Department of Trade and Industry leaflet *Danger! Fires and Heaters need Air!* available by telephoning 0870 1502 500.
- **Solid fuel - coal and smokeless fuel:**  
Solid Fuel Association FREEPHONE 0800 600 000  
Northern Ireland Coal Advisory Service Hotline 08457 125300
- **Gas:**  
Health and Safety Executive leaflet *Gas Appliances Get them Checked, Keep Them Safe* available by phoning 01787 881165  
Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI) 01256 372300
- **Oil:**  
Oil Firing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry (OFTEC) 01737 373311  
(OFTEC administer the Oil Firing Technicians registration scheme
- **For advice on chimney repairs, lining, re-lining:**  
Look for chimney Engineers in your local business directory or contact National Association of Chimney Engineers FREEPHONE 0800 09204019
- **For chimney sweeping advice on oil, gas, wood, coal and smokeless fuel chimneys:**  
Look for chimney sweeps in your local business directory or contact the National Association of Chimney Sweeps FREEPHONE 0800 833464 or the Northern Ireland Association of Chimney Sweeps 028 9039 1121
- Solid Fuel, Wood and Oil Burning Appliances: get them checked; sweep your chimneys; and be safe English
- Simneiau, Cyfarpar Llosgi Tanwydd Solid, Pren Ac Olew - Trefnwch I'w Profi, Glanhewch Eich Simneiau A Byddwch Yn Ddiogel

Information on how and where you can obtain the leaflet "Solid Fuel, Wood and Oil Burning Appliances: get them checked; sweep your chimneys; and be safe" and other publications produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is available from the ODPM publications home page.