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Introduction

Last year saw the release of CORGI’s first Carbon Monoxide Report. This sought to highlight all the known carbon monoxide incidents that had occurred during a 16 month period, explore the issues around the poisonings and offer industry solutions.

Now 12 months on, we want to see how the picture has changed. Has public awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning increased? Do we have a new set of poisoning hotspots in the UK? Do the issues and solutions to the carbon monoxide poisoning issue remain the same?

The most tragic part about the incidents that are captured in this report is that the majority of them could have been prevented if people had a greater awareness of carbon monoxide, got their gas appliances annually serviced by a CORGI registered installer and installed an audible carbon monoxide alarm.

The CORGI Carbon Monoxide Report gives us an opportunity to highlight the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning and how people can keep themselves safe from the ‘Silent Killer’. It also allows CORGI and the rest of the industry to further improve consumer safety through knowing how and where to target expenditure on carbon monoxide incident prevention and to identify where further research is required.

Mike Thompson
Chief Executive Officer
CORGI

Methodology

The 2007 CORGI Carbon Monoxide Report focused not only on poisoning incidents caused by gas but also from other fuels such as oil, wood and coal. Since the beginning of 2007 CORGI has been responsible for coordinating the Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance (COCAA), which consists of all the major energy retailers, representatives of other fuel industries, charities and manufacturers of audible carbon monoxide alarms.

CORGI has decided for this year’s report to focus solely on gas-related carbon monoxide incidents and this is for two reasons. The first is that COCAA is now the appropriate body to look at awareness and incident occurrence across all fuels, and the second reason is that a robust recording system still does not exist to detail the carbon monoxide poisoning incidents for fuels other than gas.

The 2008 report only looks at gas carbon monoxide incidents that occurred during a 12 month period from the beginning of April 2007 to the end of March 2008. This provides a month’s overlap on the previous report but this has been necessary to ensure the report falls within the industry reporting period. Any differences in statistics created by this overlap are not overly significant.

Similar to last year, CORGI has once again used information sourced from CORGI’s own Incident Investigation Team and reports in the media to allow us to create a map of incidents across the UK. CORGI’s Incident Investigation Team investigates gas related incidents on behalf of the Health & Safety Executive, the police, Npower, Powergen (Commercial), Scottish & Southern Energy PLC (which includes SWALEC and Southern Electric), and other organisations that require it.

To attempt to understand the reasons for these incidents, which are in most cases preventable, CORGI also conducted a consumer survey of 1,012 participants and a CORGI registered installer survey of 301 participants. These two surveys will allow CORGI to understand the consumer’s level of knowledge and awareness as well as how installers view the problem in the industry.
Summary

CORGI’s Incident Investigation Team has reported they were involved in the investigation of 63 carbon monoxide poisoning incidents in the UK, during the period from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. These 63 incidents resulted in 21 fatalities where carbon monoxide was the suspected cause and 42 casualties. However, CORGI’s investigations proved only 10 of the fatalities were due to carbon monoxide poisoning from gas.

An analysis of UK media reporting on carbon monoxide incidents during the same period highlighted 21 fatalities but 125 casualties. It is important to note that the overall number of deaths in the UK could be as many as is estimated through our media clipping analysis, as there are several other investigation teams in the UK other than CORGI’s.

Hotspots

Every region of the UK has been affected by carbon monoxide incidents; however, there are a number of regions that seem to be most at risk. These regional hotspots are London, Yorkshire, the Midlands and Wales.

Each region seems to have specific reasons for being more susceptible to incidents occurring but the most common reasons in all carbon monoxide poisonings continues to be a general lack of awareness or sense of the danger of carbon monoxide. Annual servicing is still not a prerequisite for many consumers, they do not have an audible carbon monoxide alarm installed and they do not mind using unqualified people to work on their gas appliances.

Timing

As you would expect, winter continues to be the season when people are most likely to suffer from a carbon monoxide incident. 45% of all the carbon monoxide incidents occurred in January, February and March of 2008.

CORGI’s advice to people is to ensure that their appliances are safety checked by a CORGI registered installer before they start using them. An important second line of defence after the safety check is to install an audible carbon monoxide alarm; however, 65% of people asked in our consumer survey still do not have one.

Causes

The most tragic part of these carbon monoxide incidents is that the majority can be avoided. The main cause of all fatalities came down to a lack of servicing and maintenance of gas appliances (52%). According to our media analysis statistics the appliance most responsible for carbon monoxide incidents is a gas boiler. This is closely followed by gas fires.

Bad installation (22%) and poor repair of gas appliances (17%) were the next two highest causes of carbon monoxide incidents. This could be related to high levels of illegal gas work. Findings show the danger of this lies not only with businesses who take on gas work without CORGI registration but also with homeowners who try to fix gas appliances themselves or who get in a family member or friend to do the work.

Vulnerable groups

The three main vulnerable groups that have been identified in this report are the elderly, those living in rented accommodation and those who live in non-English speaking communities. The rented accommodation group includes students and others living in private rented accommodation, but it also explores the issues that social housing providers experience in gaining access to tenants’ homes to carry out annual safety checks.

Our consumer survey showed that nearly 60% of elderly people do not have a carbon monoxide alarm in their home, and 25% of these people state that it is because they do not think they are at risk of poisoning.
Of all those that live in rented accommodation, only 21% have asked to see a copy of the landlord’s gas safety record, and 6% said they didn’t even know it was a legal requirement for their landlord to provide one.

A report commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment showed that in 2001 there was an estimated one to one and a half million people living in the UK who lacked the English language skills required to function in society and employment. This presents a communication barrier to a large number of people who could be at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Reporting system required
One of the key issues that this report highlights is the lack of a robust reporting system. This is required so that the industry can determine the true extent of the number of carbon monoxide incidents, especially the number of casualties.

Until this issue has been resolved it is very unlikely that we will ever be able to tell the true number of carbon monoxide poisoning incidents that occur from not only gas appliances, but also oil and solid fuels.

The Solutions
As highlighted in last year’s report, to help reduce the number of carbon monoxide incidents in the UK each year there needs to be a focus on the following:

- A robust reporting system that will determine the true extent of the carbon monoxide issue across gas, oil, coal and wood
- High profile consumer awareness campaigning that will create a notable change in behaviour – focused on those who are most vulnerable
- Research that will explore the long-term risks of ongoing exposure to carbon monoxide
- Lobbying activity to get audible carbon monoxide alarms installed in all public buildings (schools and hotels etc.)
- Support for vulnerable groups by providing grants for replacement of old appliances, provision of audible carbon monoxide alarms and assistance with appliance servicing
A disabled man was saved by his carbon monoxide alarm when his gas cooker started leaking deadly fumes. The alarm suddenly went off as the man sat at home; he had already started feeling dizzy when the alarm sounded. The gas company was called and they traced the problem to a faulty grill on his cooker.

Comparison

The production of a second Carbon Monoxide Report allows us to see how the awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning has changed.

We cannot conduct a straight comparison against the number of incidents, fatalities and injuries in this year’s report against those of last year’s report because we have only looked at gas-related incidents this year.

What we can explore, is the levels of awareness and attitudes towards carbon monoxide issues by the public to determine whether or not the situation is getting better or worse.

Hotspot areas

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<th>Last year’s hotspot regions</th>
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Awareness levels

General awareness levels continue to be low. Our consumer research has shown that in some cases people think they have a good knowledge of carbon monoxide poisoning but when questioned further, their knowledge is either incorrect or, at best, incomplete.

Last year’s consumer survey revealed that nearly 80% of people believed they knew the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. This level of awareness has now dropped to 67% - and some of these respondents have identified incorrect symptoms.

The number of people who know how to switch off the gas supply to their home is also disappointing. Last year almost half did not know how to turn off their gas, this year it has risen to 60%.

Appliance servicing

The lack of servicing and maintenance of gas appliances continues to be a key factor in the majority of all carbon monoxide incidents. Even though this simple activity could prevent over half of all incidents occurring, the consumer survey shows that people are still failing to get safety checks carried out by a CORGI registered installer.

This year’s report has seen a decrease in the number of people who get their appliances checked on a regular basis. Last year 15% of people had never had any of their gas appliances checked - this has increased this year to 17% of all respondents.

Carbon monoxide alarms

Last year our consumer survey revealed 90% of the public had a smoke alarm in their home. Almost three quarters did not have a carbon monoxide alarm. The number of people with smoke alarms this year has increased by 1% but unfortunately, 65% of those surveyed do not have a carbon monoxide alarm. Last year, 3% of people did not even know what a carbon monoxide alarm was and this statistic remains unchanged this year.

Use of illegal gas workers

It seems that the message about the dangers of illegal gas workers might be starting get through to people, and this could be as a result of an increase in publicity around the prosecution of illegal gas workers in the media. However, this year’s results still leave cause for concern about this issue.

Last year’s figures showed that less than one in ten homeowners would use an illegal gas worker to carry out gas work on their appliances, although one in three admitted they would not ask to see the installer’s CORGI ID card as proof of their registration.

This year, 91% of survey participants said they would only use a CORGI registered installer, however 5% would still use a family member rather than call in a professional. 71% of people said they would ask to see an installer’s CORGI ID card before they started work on their appliances, but nearly 15% would not even think to ask for one.
Regional Hotspots

We have used the data collected from the media reports to work out the hotspot areas. When you take into account the population levels in the regions against the number of incidents, the top four hotspots in order in the UK are:

- London
- Yorkshire
- The Midlands
- Wales

Why is Northern Ireland not a hotspot?

You will see from many of the graphs that highlight the regional level of knowledge on carbon monoxide poisoning, installation of carbon monoxide alarms and servicing of gas appliances, that Northern Ireland performs significantly worse than all other regions. The reason for this is the majority of households in Northern Ireland use oil instead of gas as their fuel source. This point means Northern Ireland has not been listed as a hotspot, but there is obviously still a lot of work to be done on consumer awareness in that region.

Not only does London appear in the top four for the first time, but it tops the list for the region where the most carbon monoxide incidents have occurred in the past reporting year. The consumer survey reveals an alarming lack of awareness and goes a long way to explain why the capital is such a hotspot.

London is the worst region for admitting they would use someone who is not CORGI registered to work on gas in their home, and after Northern Ireland (where there are more homes fuelled by oil than gas) London is also the worst region for getting annual gas safety checks carried out on their appliances. Nearly 60% of Londoners do not have a carbon monoxide alarm, and 7% have admitted to not even knowing what a carbon monoxide alarm is.

Despite having nearly a third of all the media coverage on carbon monoxide poisoning incidents – thus creating the greatest opportunity for awareness – Yorkshire once again appeared in the top four hotspots.

The consumer survey does not give many clues as to why Yorkshire is such a hotspot; awareness levels of carbon monoxide poisoning and the symptoms are not notably low in comparison with other regions. However, 40% of survey respondents from Yorkshire said they lived in rented accommodation and this could be one of the reasons why there is such a high level of incidents.

A two-year-old girl living with her mother in North London was admitted to hospital after breathing in dangerous carbon monoxide fumes from a faulty boiler. The local Housing Association then sent an engineer to check the appliance, after which it was condemned and they were warned not to use it.
According to the Government Office for Yorkshire and The Humber, over £154 million has been committed from 2004 to 2008 to help restructure declining areas of the housing market in South Yorkshire and provide affordable housing. An additional £393 million in local authority allocations for 2007/08 was awarded to give vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life through strategically planned housing-related services. Poor quality housing stock could be a contributing factor to Yorkshire’s second year in the top four hotspots list. From Wales and the Midlands, nearly 70% of all respondents from both of these regions do not have a carbon monoxide alarm, and Wales is one of the worst regions for not getting their appliances safety checked annually.

People in Wales also appear to think they know about carbon monoxide poisoning, but the research shows that in fact some do not. Nearly 80% of survey participants said they knew what the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning were but when they were questioned further, approximately 10% could not correctly identify the symptoms.

In the Midlands it seems that illegal gas work could be a contributing factor to the high number of incidents. Those surveyed in the Midlands, came second after London out of the top four hotspot regions for being the most likely to get a family member to work on their gas appliances, rather than calling in a CORGI registered installer.

![Graph showing homes that do not have carbon monoxide alarms](image1)

![Graph showing homes that have never had their gas appliances checked](image2)

![Graph showing people who do not know the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning](image3)

**Region Key**

- A East England
- B London
- C The Midlands
- D North East
- E North West
- F Northern Ireland
- G Scotland
- H South East
- I South West
- J Wales
- K Yorkshire
According to our sources, in the 12-month period from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 there were 63 carbon monoxide incidents caused by gas appliances in the UK. Our media analysis statistics indicate that these resulted in 21 deaths and a further 125 injuries.
The National Picture

Due to the lack of a robust reporting system, these numbers could be even higher than this report suggests. We believe these statistics to be merely the tip of the iceberg. There could be many people living day-to-day with the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning who are not aware of it.

Nobody can be sure how many patients are visiting their GP suffering from the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning and are told they are suffering from influenza, which has similar symptoms. Nor can we be sure how many deaths are really caused by carbon monoxide poisoning because a blood sample of the deceased is only taken and tested for carbon monoxide poisoning if this is suspected to be the cause of death.

In France, the average number of deaths through carbon monoxide poisoning each year is significantly higher than in the UK. This is proven through a compulsory test for carbon monoxide poisoning at every post mortem. If the UK was to conduct the same tests, we predict the statistics for carbon monoxide deaths would skyrocket.

There has also been little research carried out to determine what long-term damage can be caused to individuals who have been exposed to what the industry would describe as low-level carbon monoxide poisoning (however, if anyone is presenting with any of the symptoms of carbon monoxide i.e. headaches or nausea, they may have already been exposed to high and unsafe levels of carbon monoxide poisoning). Anecdotal evidence has shown that many victims of carbon monoxide poisoning suffer with long-term health problems such as memory loss, brain damage, and paralysis of limbs, to name but a few.

The reporting system is also a reason why CORGI has decided to concentrate this report solely on gas-related carbon monoxide poisoning incidents. There is currently no official system to record the incidents caused through carbon monoxide poisoning from a solid fuel appliance. This is also the case for casualties from gas appliances.
The number of deaths that are noted in this report would appear to be down when compared with last year. However, it must be taken into account that this year we have focused solely on gas-related incidents, which accounts for the decrease. Many in the gas industry believe the numbers of carbon monoxide incidents from gas appliances are on the decrease and that in fact, it is solid fuel appliances that are now responsible for the majority of carbon monoxide deaths.

Seasonal influence
As per last year’s report, winter is the worst season for carbon monoxide poisoning incidents. January and February consistently remain the worse months for incident rates, and of course this is due to a decrease in the temperature and an increase in the amount of people using their gas appliances. However, it is not simply just a case of an increase in people turning on their gas fires or central heating; some incidents have been caused by people misusing their appliances, such as using the gas cooker to heat the house.

In January, February and March 2008, just over 45% of all the incidents occurred in these months alone and these incidents caused nearly a third of all fatalities and casualties.

Causes of incidents
The cause of many of the carbon monoxide incidents in this report reveal how preventable the incidents could have been and how truly senseless the fatalities are, because 52% of the incidents were caused through a lack of servicing and maintenance. People could have avoided carbon monoxide poisoning simply by ensuring they had their gas appliances serviced and safety checked annually by a CORGI registered installer and by installing an audible carbon monoxide alarm.

After a lack of service and maintenance, the most common causes of incidents were bad installation (22%) and bad repair (17%). These results could also have been avoided if people chose to only use a CORGI registered installer. Research carried out by CORGI last year showed that illegal gas workers are 32 times more likely to cause a carbon monoxide related incident than a CORGI registered installer. With an estimated 20,000 business carrying out gas work illegally in the UK, homeowners must be vigilant in ensuring they know exactly who they are letting into their home to work on their gas.

However, it is not just the illegal gas working businesses that pose a threat to gas safety. CORGI's consumer research has suggested that many people would be tempted to try their hand with DIY when it comes to their gas appliances, or they would ask a friend or relative to undertake the work before they would seek out a professional and qualified CORGI registered installer.

A deadly combination
It seems that although more and more people are gradually starting to become aware of the issue of carbon monoxide, many are confused as to how to keep themselves safe. This breeds a general attitude of apathy towards the problem, with many saying that they have never really considered it as an issue that could affect them. This creates a deadly combination.

CORGI’s consumer survey carried out for the purposes of this report, showed that 67% of people think they know about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning and yet only 57% of people have their appliances serviced annually. Only 31.9% have an audible carbon monoxide alarm installed.

| Awareness of Symptoms Nationally | 66.6% knew the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning | 33.4% did not know the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning |
A family was rushed to hospital after their carbon monoxide alarm went off in the night. The Council maisonette they lived in was filled with the deadly fumes after a faulty boiler started producing the gas. Tests revealed the family had high levels of carbon monoxide in their blood. Had it not been for the audible carbon monoxide alarm sounding clearly while they were asleep, the consequences could have been far worse.
The incidents highlighted on this map have been collated through our media reporting analysis.
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Issues

This report has highlighted some of the issues that result in the numbers of deaths and injuries each year. It is hoped that through identifying these issues, people can become vigilant to the dangers of carbon monoxide and learn how to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

Lack of awareness

As you would expect, it is the general lack of awareness held by the public that continues to contribute to the incident numbers. If people knew the dangers, knew what to look for in terms of warning signs and symptoms and were clear on how to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning in their homes, then these avoidable poisonings would cease.

According to the survey carried out with CORGI registered installers, they perceive only about 37% of their customers to have any kind of awareness of carbon monoxide.

Recognising symptoms

The public is not really sure which appliances can produce carbon monoxide and how to identify the signs that an appliance may be functioning incorrectly – almost 30% of survey respondents said they did not know the warning signs.

In the event of a carbon monoxide leak nearly 70% of respondents said they would recognise the symptoms of poisoning. However, when questioned on what those symptoms are, a significant number of respondents incorrectly identified symptoms that are not related to carbon monoxide poisoning.

This lack of symptom awareness is also shared by the medical community, who do not always recognise the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning when they are presented in their patients. Influenza is a common misdiagnosis as this shares many of the symptoms.

There have been stories about carbon monoxide poisoning sufferers being told by their GP that they are suffering from the ‘flu and to go home, wrap up warm and turn on the heating.

It is hoped that through a two-pronged awareness strategy involving the medical community and the public, that people will begin to recognise the correlation between these ‘flu-like symptoms and the use of gas appliances in the home.

Although awareness levels are slowly rising, it is often only through a poisoning event in someone’s local community that their attention is focused on the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Servicing of appliances

Regular servicing of appliances not only helps to identify potential or current problems but can also extend the useful life of equipment. People would not go years without servicing or maintaining their cars, yet many are quite happy to leave their gas appliances unchecked, in some cases for over five years, or until the appliance stops working.

This approach is not sensible as our research has shown that CORGI registered installers are at their busiest in October and November, when nearly a quarter of all their work is done for the year. People who are looking to get their appliances fixed during this time could be left waiting.

The installer survey once again identified some worrying statistics. Just over 72% of installers said they have discovered a carbon monoxide leak on a customer’s appliance.

A young couple narrowly escaped death after they both collapsed from inhaling carbon monoxide produced by a faulty boiler. The young woman managed to call the ambulance service shortly before she passed out. The ambulance crew said when found, the couple were both minutes from death. Awareness of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning saved their lives.
Although 57% of respondents said they have had their appliances serviced within the past year a worrying 17% of respondents said they have never had their appliance serviced. This highlights that these people who continue to live with un-checked gas appliances could be a carbon monoxide poisoning statistic waiting to happen.

Whereas most providers of social housing are aware of their duties regarding servicing of appliances there is seen to be a greater risk from private landlords who may not be as aware of their responsibilities. This risk is increased if tenants are unaware of their rights to ask to see the appropriate documentation.

The majority of respondents to our consumer survey who live in rented accommodation had not asked their landlord to provide them with an up-to-date gas safety certificate. Over a quarter said they did not know this was a legal requirement for their landlord.

Carbon monoxide alarms

Audible carbon monoxide alarms provide a good second line of defence, in conjunction with the annual servicing of appliances. CORGI and COCAA do not recommended the use of cheaper ‘black spot’ detectors that are often inaccurate (the colour can change if someone is smoking nearby). These cannot alert you to a carbon monoxide leak if you are out of the room, asleep or overcome by carbon monoxide fumes.

Although in excess of 90% of consumers have a smoke alarm in their home, only around 30% have a carbon monoxide alarm. Troublingly, around 3% of survey participants did not even know what a carbon monoxide alarm was.

When questioned as to why they do not have a carbon monoxide alarm fitted, nearly 60% of respondents said they had simply never considered buying one.

As installers are often the first point of contact with consumers when an issue arises with an appliance, installers were also tested on their own knowledge of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. Nearly 50% of CORGI registered installers say they recommend that their customers install an audible carbon monoxide alarm.

Illegal gas work

Recent research undertaken by CORGI has indicated that there could be as many as 20,000 businesses in the UK working on gas illegally; that is, without being CORGI registered.

However, this estimated number of 20,000 illegal gas working businesses in the UK, does not take into account the number of people that attempt to fix or install a gas appliance themselves, or get an unregistered friend or relative to do it.

With nearly 40% of carbon monoxide incidents being caused through bad installation and repair, there is no doubt that the rise in popularity with ‘DIY’ will continue to pose a risk to the public if they choose to ‘DIY’ with gas appliances.

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**Percentage of appliances checked**

<table>
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<th>Percentage of appliances checked</th>
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<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Last year</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Two years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Three to five years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Five years ago</td>
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**Why don’t you have a carbon monoxide alarm?**

A - 57% have never really considered buying one
B - 21.6% do not think they are at risk
C - 14.7% other reasons, not specified
D - 10.9% said they are too expensive
E - 4.2% said they would be able to tell if there was a gas leak in their house
Vulnerable Groups

Due to the nature of carbon monoxide, those physically most at risk are the very young and the elderly. However, there are other factors that play a part in categorising the vulnerable groups.

The elderly
The smaller or frailer a person is, the more quickly their body is overcome by carbon monoxide. This is why the elderly are more at risk of death through carbon monoxide poisoning.

According to our consumer awareness survey nearly 60% of elderly people do not have a carbon monoxide alarm in their home, 25% of these people state that it is because they do not think they are at risk of poisoning. Nearly 50% have just never considered buying one, and worryingly, 1.5% do not even know what a carbon monoxide alarm is.

This lack of knowledge extends to other areas such as knowledge of carbon monoxide symptoms. Nearly 74% of elderly people surveyed said they do know what the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are, but when questioned further, 44% said that sore eyes are a symptom – this is not correct.

Rented accommodation
People that live in private rented accommodation are also vulnerable. This is down to a number of reasons; lack of awareness of carbon monoxide; lack of knowledge about their rights as tenants, and general apathy – “it’s the landlord’s responsibility”.

Of all those surveyed that live in rented accommodation, only 21% have asked to see a copy of the landlord’s gas safety record, and 6% said they didn’t even know it was a legal requirement for their landlord to provide one.
Students
Students who are living in private rented accommodation and away from home for the first time are vulnerable due to the same reasons as other tenants. Coupled with this is the possibility that, of all the issues a student has to face, carbon monoxide awareness may not be considered a priority. Our survey showed that 63% of student-aged participants did not have a carbon monoxide alarm and 45% do not know what the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are.

Private rented sector
The private rented accommodation sector may have problems with tenants not being provided with landlord’s gas safety records, but there is a different issue for council and social landlords. Many social landlords that attempt to fulfill their legal obligations by sending in service engineers to do annual gas safety checks are not granted access to the properties by the tenants. This has resulted in a number of local councils taking legal action against the property’s residents.

Non-English speakers
Common sense suggests that those who do not speak English are more at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning simply because they do not understand much of the safety information provided in the UK.

A report commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment in 2001 showed that at least three million people living in the United Kingdom were born in countries where English is not the national language. The report also said that an estimated 1 to 1.5 million people living in the UK at that time the research was commissioned, lacked the English language skills required to function in society and employment. Over the past seven years, immigration levels have soared and these figures could be higher than estimated in 2001.

Language skills and a lack of knowledge provide this group with a life-threatening combination that makes them very vulnerable to carbon monoxide poisoning.

It is important to note that some groups are more vulnerable than others due to their circumstances, but if you fail to get your gas appliances serviced annually, your flues or ventilation are blocked and you do not install a carbon monoxide alarm, you too can be at risk of poisoning – there is no room for complacency because no one is immune.
Solutions

The issues examined in this report highlight just how crucial carbon monoxide awareness is. There are a number of things that both the industry and the public can do to help stop the ‘Silent Killer’ from taking any more lives.

Although the number of deaths and injuries caused by carbon monoxide are not considered high enough by the general public to warrant concern, CORGI believes that due to the majority of these being so avoidable, that one death is a death too many.

Awareness
More funding is called for from all parts of the industry in order to aid research, education, training and awareness raising activity. It is the responsibility of the whole industry to invest in educating the public on the dangers of carbon monoxide. This should extend from installers carrying out work to energy suppliers communicating with their customers, and to the media through which the industry uses to communicate with the wider community.

Potential incidents need to be more readily anticipated with campaigns during the riskiest times of year e.g. at the start of the heating season in September. For example, programmes have been set up to help CORGI inspectors raise awareness in their local area, particularly among vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and ethnic minority groups.

Annual appliance checks
A lack of servicing and maintenance of appliances are the main causes of carbon monoxide poisoning incidents. So not only is it essential that consumers use a CORGI registered installer for the installation of gas appliances, but they must also ensure all gas appliances are serviced annually by a CORGI registered installer to make sure standards of safety are maintained over time.

As previously mentioned, the routine service and maintenance of gas appliances in people’s homes could prevent the majority of all carbon monoxide incidents each year.

Tackling illegal gas workers
CORGI has done a lot in the past couple of years to tackle the issue of illegal gas workers in the UK. This has involved research to identify how big the ‘black’ market is and to profile the types of businesses that carry out illegal gas work. Armed with this information, CORGI has now put in place a strategy to reduce the number of illegal gas workers – this includes a dedicated National Registration Team that investigates reports of illegal gas work from CORGI registered installers and members of the public.

CORGI continues to work closely with the media, in particular with programmes such as BBC Watchdog and Rogue Traders, to help raise awareness with members of the public that they should only use CORGI registered installers and that if they have used an illegal gas worker that they should report them to CORGI.

Increased saturation of carbon monoxide alarms
Through increased awareness of carbon monoxide, it is hoped that public knowledge about the importance of installing an audible carbon monoxide alarm will increase. Presently, the major reason for people not having a carbon monoxide alarm installed in their home is due to them simply not ever considering having one.
Carbon monoxide alarms are approximately four times the price of a smoke alarm, but increased demand for this product due to greater public awareness, should see the price start to go down. Corgi and COCAA are looking to work closely with the Fire Service to help with the increase in saturation of carbon monoxide alarms throughout the UK.

Detection and diagnosis
Due to the similarity between symptoms, influenza is a common misdiagnosis for carbon monoxide poisoning, sometimes even among the medical profession. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists should be made more aware of the symptoms and given better resources to test for carbon monoxide. Breath analysers should be more widely available in all surgeries and pharmacies so that fewer cases go undetected. Particular care should be taken when dealing with vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, who may be infirm or live alone.

Rented accommodation
Landlords who have breached the gas safety laws and put lives at risk have faced tough sentencing in the courts. Social housing providers have good knowledge of their obligations regarding servicing of appliances, but there is still an increased risk from private landlords, where awareness is lower and there is less enforcement.

It is important that tenants in every type of rented accommodation ask their landlord to present an obligatory up-to-date gas safety record. This should extend to student accommodation and holiday lets e.g. cottages, caravans, boats.

Consumers must be just as vigilant about staying safe when away from home. Hotels have received media attention on more than one occasion within the last year regarding carbon monoxide poisoning incidents, prompting them to keep gas appliances within their premises fully maintained for the safety of their guests.

Whether holiday accommodation or longer-lease rented property, when it comes to providing safety guidance on carbon monoxide, extra care should be taken of non-English speaking guests and tenants. Landlords and hotel owners can now obtain information on carbon monoxide and gas safety in Polish, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Welsh. Leaflets are available for free download from Corgi’s website.

Looking ahead
With combined knowledge and expertise, all these groups must join forces to better understand and respond to carbon monoxide incidents across the UK. Consistent research and annual data collection – region, age, gender, income, incident type – is a vital, ongoing part of this. Identifying patterns will ensure tailored initiatives are maintained to best assist vulnerable groups and regions, moving towards the common goal of eradicating incidents of this ‘Silent Killer’.

Two young families who had rented a holiday caravan had a narrow escape after carbon monoxide leaked into the mobile home from a faulty gas hob. The children had become lethargic and quiet and one of the mothers was also showing signs of carbon monoxide poisoning after sleeping almost constantly for two days. The cause of their symptoms was revealed when they noticed the hob was producing bright yellow flames. An engineer for the caravan park revealed that the appliance had not been checked for over two years.
CORGi’s Role

CORGi is the only body charged by the Government’s Health & Safety Executive (HSE) to maintain a register of competent gas installers in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

The law says that anyone employed to carry out gas related work must be registered with CORGi. If they are not CORGi registered, then they are working illegally.

CORGi is not empowered to prosecute illegal gas workers, but it investigates reports from the public and CORGi installers. These investigations are undertaken in order for CORGi to pass as many details as possible onto the HSE so they can prepare a case for prosecution.

As well as running the gas registration scheme, CORGi also has a responsibility to promote the awareness of gas safety and carbon monoxide poisoning in the UK. CORGi runs campaigns regularly to help in this promotion and has also introduced several initiatives to further promote best practice. COCAA will now focus on launching a high profile public awareness campaign on carbon monoxide towards the end of September 2008.

This Alliance was set up in response to the All Party Parliamentary Gas Safety Group (APPGSG) report on an inquiry into carbon monoxide awareness in 2006. The Alliance consists of all the major energy retailers, representatives across all fuel types, victim support charities and representation from manufacturers of carbon monoxide alarms. COCAA will now focus on launching a high profile public awareness campaign on carbon monoxide towards the end of 2008.

CORGi also coordinates an Industry Forum with all the major merchants and manufacturers, with an aim to help the industry work together on best practice solutions, sharing knowledge and safety information and to look at the issue of illegal gas work in the UK.

In 2005, The CORGi Trust was set up. The Trust is a registered charity that aims to promote and support gas safety. It is the sole shareholder of the CORGi Group Limited, which operates the gas registration scheme. All funds that are generated through CORGi’s commercial activities are donated to The CORGi Trust in order to be invested back into gas safety. No funds from the gas registration scheme or CORGi’s competent persons schemes are used by The Trust as these schemes are ring-fenced.

The CORGi Trust, has recently announced its new strategy for tackling issues that affect the gas industry. The ‘Blue Flame’ strategy outlines the key activity surrounding the five current focus areas of The CORGi Trust; education and training; research; awareness raising; equipment e.g. carbon monoxide alarms, and governance of The Trust. In order for The CORGi Trust to achieve its objectives it will work in partnership with a number of key stakeholders across several industries that share similar aims to promote safety in the UK.

The CORGi Trust supports and funds a number of important activities across the trade and consumer sector and is a proud sponsor of the Child Accident Prevention Trust’s ‘Child Safety Week 2008’ (www.capt.org.uk/csweek).

The CORGi website, www.trustcorgi.com, contains further information on gas safety. The CORGi Trust and search functions to help consumers to find a CORGi registered installer in their area.
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Website www.trustcorgi.com
Email enquiries@trustcorgi.com