



Going on holiday? Don't forget to pack your CO alarm

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Holidaymakers are being urged to pack an audible Carbon Monoxide alarm along with their sun cream before heading off on their seasonal break. It could save their lives.

The advice is being issued by the charity CO Awareness and the Health Protection Agency North West as thousand of Brits prepare for their summer holidays.

CO-Awareness President Lynn Griffiths said: "There have been a number of tragedies and numerous near-misses in this country and abroad in recent years. No one should assume that their hotel room, holiday home, caravan or canal boat is safe.

"Audible CO alarms can be purchased comparatively cheaply from most hardware and electrical stores and from the larger supermarket chains. They are small and unobtrusive and will easily pack into a suitcase. It is a small investment to make but it could pay a rich dividend."

Exposure to high levels of carbon monoxide causes more than 50 accidental deaths every year in England and Wales and there have been some high profile tragedies overseas.

Professor Qutub Syed, Director, HPA North West, said: "In small spaces such as hotel rooms, caravans, boats and rented houses and cottages, levels of carbon monoxide produced by faulty, poorly maintained or poorly ventilated fossil fuel appliances can build up very quickly to levels that can kill.

"It happens all too regularly and our appeal to people planning their holidays is; don't let it happen to you.

"Even at lower levels, carbon monoxide can make you ill. It produces symptoms similar to flu or food poisoning, including headaches, tiredness, difficulty in thinking clearly and feeling sick.

"Our advice to holiday-makers is that If you do not have an alarm, it is unlikely you will know that you are being poisoned by this lethal gas as carbon monoxide is colourless and has no taste or smell."

Notes to editors

Carbon monoxide (CO) is produced when fossil fuels burn without enough air, usually as a result of poor maintenance of central heating boilers and appliances such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas, or kerosene-powered fridges, heaters or cookers. It also becomes a major problem when flues become partially or wholly blocked.

Carbon monoxide poisoning reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood and so starves vital organs of oxygen. The symptoms worsen as more carbon monoxide is breathed in and CO concentrations in the blood increase.

Anyone who suspects they may be suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning should immediately turn off all appliances, go outside and seek medical help from a qualified healthcare professional or, if in the UK, call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Do not use heaters or cooking appliances that produce yellow instead of mostly blue flames. Malfunctioning appliances should be turned off and not used again until they have been checked and made safe by a registered engineer.

People with milder symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning usually begin to recover when they leave the contaminated area and move into fresh air. Exposure to high levels of CO can kill.

Further health advice is available on the HPA website at: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/carbonmonoxide>

General advice

- Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) powered appliances should be serviced by a Gas Safe registered engineer who is qualified to work with LPG.
- Solid fuel appliances should be serviced by a solid fuel HETAS registered engineer.
- Oil fuelled appliances should be serviced by an OFTEC registered engineer.
- For their personal safety, holiday-makers should buy an audible carbon monoxide alarm that meets British or European Standards (EN 50291).

Useful external links

Gas Safe Register – 0800 408 5500 or visit <http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/>

Solid Fuel Association (SFA) helpline - call 0845 601 4406 or visit www.solidfuel.co.uk

Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme (HETAS) call 0845 634 5626 or visit www.hetas.co.uk

Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) – helpline 0845 65 85 080 or visit www.oftec.org

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