Carbon monoxide: the invisible killer

▶ What should you do?

If you suspect that carbon monoxide poisoning might be occurring:
- Warn any other people living in the same house
- Leave the house as quickly as possible
- Close the front door
- Dial the national emergency number 112 and follow the emergency service's instructions
- Consult your family doctor

▶ Systems and installations

Poorly functioning water heaters, central heating systems or gas heaters may be dangerous. Their poor functioning may be due to insufficient ventilation, to their being polluted or due to incorrect system settings. That is why the Fire Services advises you to have such systems and installations checked by an accredited fitter every year.

▶ What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a highly dangerous gas that is the product of the incomplete combustion of gas or wood or other materials. It is the ultimate invisible killer: carbon monoxide is tasteless and odourless, but carbon monoxide poisoning can cause you to pass out and die.

▶ Symptoms

Carbon monoxide poisoning happens quickly. You should therefore be alert to the following symptoms:
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Throwing up
- Feeling tired
- Being confused
- Feeling sleepy
- An accelerated heart beat

The flame of the burner of a properly working installation is blue. Possible signs that things may be wrong with your installation are:
- A yellow/orange gas flame
- Windows that have steamed up
- A gas smell
- Physical symptoms

▶ Open fire places and gas burners

Carbon monoxide can also enter your home through the flue of your open fire place or your multi-fuel heater. This occurs if a flue is polluted or clogged up and does not work properly. This may be due to birds' nests, dislodged mortar, rocks or a poor quality flue. The active use of a heater may also cause a flue to clog up. That is why the Fire Service advises you to have your chimney swept every year by a chimney sweep who is a member of the Dutch Association of Professional Chimney Sweeps (Algemene Schoorsteenvegers Patroons Bond).
You can find further information on *www.aspb.nl*.

▶ Ensure good ventilation

Make sure that there is sufficient oxygen in your home. You can do this yourself by providing sufficient ventilation so that enough fresh air enters your home. Most modern houses are very well insulated. A side effect of this is that there is much less natural ventilation through cracks and holes. Should carbon monoxide ever be released in your home, having sufficient oxygen may save your life.

Be mindful of your own safety:
- Never light a barbecue in the home
- Never completely seal air inlets and outlets
- Keep the flue of your central heating boiler clean and in a good condition to ensure that sufficient air is always being supplied
- Keep the exhaust fan for the kitchen and the central exhaust ventilation system for your kitchen, toilet and bathroom clean and in a good condition
- Consider whether it is wise to use draught proofing materials or sealant to close any gaps and joints, especially if there is no ventilation system in your home

▶ Carbon monoxide detector

A carbon monoxide detector may save your life. If the carbon monoxide level in the air is too high, this detector will sound a loud alarm. You can buy these detectors at various DIY outlets. Carefully follow the installation instructions, so that you know where to position the detector. Also read the manual, so that you will know what to do if the alarm ever sounds. Check the detector once a month to make sure it still works.

Note: an annual service and a carbon monoxide detector will make your home a safer place to live in.

The dangers of carbon monoxide

In this leaflet…

Carbon monoxide, also called CO, is a ruthless, invisible killer. Carbon monoxide is tasteless and odourless, but it can cause you to pass out and die. Unfortunately, several people fall victim to carbon monoxide poisoning every year. This leaflet tells you what you can do to prevent this from happening to you.

www.brandweer.nl/koolmonoxide

The dangers of CO

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