



Teaching Carbon Monoxide Awareness: resource 3

Background information about carbon monoxide for teachers

This information can be adapted for use with your class or for additional support for those with SEND if required.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless, highly poisonous gas that can kill quickly. Levels that do not kill can cause serious harm to health if breathed in over a long period.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be caused by incomplete burning of any fuel such as gas, oil, coal and wood – excess CO is produced when a fuel does not burn properly.

Gas, oil, coal and wood are sources of fuel used in many household appliances, including:

- boilers
- fires (gas, oil, wood, coal, charcoal)
- central heating systems
- water heaters
- cookers
- open fires

The main cause of accidental exposure to CO is household appliances which have been damaged, incorrectly installed or badly maintained.

The risk of exposure to CO from portable devices may also be higher in caravans, boats, tents and mobile homes.

Other possible causes of CO emissions include:

- blocked flues and chimneys.
- burning fuel in an enclosed or unventilated space – for example, running a car engine, petrol-powered generator or barbecue inside a garage, or a faulty boiler in an enclosed kitchen.
- faulty, blocked or leaking car exhausts.
- fluid fumes – some cleaning fluids and paint removers contain methylene chloride (dichloromethane), which can cause carbon monoxide poisoning if breathed in.
- smoking shisha pipes indoors – shisha pipes burn charcoal and tobacco, which can lead to a build-up of CO in enclosed or unventilated rooms.

Symptoms of CO poisoning include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Drowsiness
- Breathlessness
- Chest or stomach pains

Additional information can be found at:

www.co-awareness.org.uk

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/domestic/co.htm>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Carbon-monoxide-poisoning/Pages/introduction.aspx>