

Gas Information Sheet No. 35

Carbon Monoxide Gas Alert for Medical Practitioners and Emergency Workers

Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) wishes to alert medical practitioners, paramedics, firemen and hospital doctors and nursing staff of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning, which may be caused by faulty domestic gas appliances.

Medical practitioners need to be thorough and observant when examining their patients, not only asking them about their condition but also asking them about their surroundings, so that vital information is not overlooked.

Carbon monoxide can emanate from a number of sources and symptoms can be subtle and easily missed. They may present as shortness of breath, mild nausea, mild headaches or show as flu-like symptoms. Carbon monoxide by its nature is very difficult for people to detect.

Sources of carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide gas is formed when fuels such as natural gas, LP gas, coal, petrol and wood are incompletely burned. The following gas appliances may produce carbon monoxide gas:

- Gas heaters
(space heaters, wall furnaces and ducted central heaters).
- Gas water heaters.
- Stove tops and ovens.
- Gas powered refrigerators.
- Decorative log fires.
- Barbeques.

Questions to ask

If carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected, patients should be questioned about their situation at home. Consider asking your patients the following questions:

- Do you feel ill in your home?
- Are you operating a gas appliance or heater at the time you feel ill?
- Do you feel better if you go outside into fresh air?

ESV also suggests that patients should be checked for motor and balance disturbances and cognitive difficulties. These checks may indicate carbon monoxide poisoning.

Further information

Energy Safe Victoria believes it is very important for medical practitioners to discuss carbon monoxide poisoning with their patients. If you require further information please contact the Gas Installation and Appliance Safety Engineer on 9271 5408.