

Home Safety



Gas safety

The problem

Every year about 30 people in the UK die from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gas appliances and flues, which have not been properly installed or maintained. Many other people also suffer ill health. When gas does not burn properly, as with other fuels such as coal, wood or oil, excess carbon monoxide is produced, which is poisonous.

You can't see it. You can't taste it. You can't even smell it. But carbon monoxide

can kill without warning in a matter of hours.

You are particularly at risk when asleep because you cannot recognise the early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning. These include tiredness, drowsiness, headache, nausea, pains in the chest and stomach pains. These symptoms may easily be confused with flu or simple tiredness.

If you or your family experience the above symptoms, and you believe carbon monoxide may be involved, **you must seek urgent medical advice.**



Your doctor will need to test a blood or breath sample. Carbon monoxide quickly leaves the blood and tests may be inaccurate if taken more than four hours after exposure has ended.

You are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if:

- Your appliance was poorly installed.
- Your appliance is not working properly.
- Your appliance has not been checked for safety or maintained regularly.
- There is not enough fresh air in the room.
- Your chimney or flue gets blocked up.
- You allow non-Gas Safe-registered engineers to install or maintain your appliance(s).

A safe gas appliance

There is a particular risk if you sleep in a room where an appliance, which is not of the room-sealed type (e.g. a conventional gas fire), is left burning at night.

(Flue outlets for room-sealed appliances are commonly located on an external wall at a low level protected by a cage, rather than at or above roof level).

The answers

NEVER use a gas appliance if you think it is not working properly.

Signs to look out for include yellow or orange flames (except fuel-effect fires which display this colour flame), soot or stains around the appliance and pilot lights which frequently blow out.

NEVER cover an appliance or block the conventional air vents.

NEVER block or obstruct any fixed ventilation grilles or air bricks.

CAUTION: Whenever draught exclusion, ceiling or extraction fans, double glazing or conservatory extensions are fitted to a room containing a gas appliance, the appliance should subsequently be checked for safety.

ALL gas consumers must have appliances checked for safety and serviced **at least every 12 months** by a Gas Safe-registered service engineer.

Carbon monoxide alarms are a useful back-up precaution but must **NOT** be regarded as a substitute for proper installation and maintenance of gas equipment by a Gas Safe-registered installer. If you decide to buy a carbon monoxide alarm, ensure it meets current safety standards (BS 7860 or BS EN 50291) and carries the Kitemark. If in doubt ask a member of staff for advice. Always follow the manufacturer's siting instructions.

Gas leaks

If you smell gas, or suspect there is a gas escape, you should immediately:

- Open all doors and windows.
- Shut off the gas supply at the meter control valve (if you know where it is). If gas continues to escape call **Wales and West**

Utilities on the Gas Emergency Freephone Number 0800 111 999.

- In the case of suspected carbon monoxide leakage, follow the above procedure, except if you are able to identify the specific appliance at fault. In this case you should consult a Gas Safe-registered installer to investigate and make repairs.

The law

The Gas Safety (installation and use) Regulations, 1998 places duties on gas consumers, installers, suppliers and landlords. These regulations are linked to other safety controls on combustion equipment, e.g. the Building Regulations, which set the safety standards for ventilation and flues.

For your own protection remember:

- **By law, anyone carrying out work on gas appliances or fittings as part of their business must be**

competent and registered with Gas Safe. Always ask to see your installer's current Gas Safe photo ID card which has their photograph, Gas Safe registration number, trading title and the expiry date of the card. The reverse of the card details what kind of gas work the installer is able to do. You can also call Gas Safe during normal office hours on **0800 408 5500** or log on to the Gas Safe website on **www.gassaferegister.co.uk**. Gas service engineers working on behalf of Plymouth Community Homes have an ID card confirming their identity.

- **By law only a competent person can carry out work on gas appliances or fittings.** Do-it-yourself work on gas appliances or fittings could be dangerous and is likely to be illegal.
- **By law you must not use any gas appliance or fittings you know or suspect to be unsafe.**

Through Gas Safe, the Health and Safety Executive has asked all registered installers to disconnect any gas appliance or fittings, which are so dangerous as to be a threat to life if used. If your installer asks your permission to disconnect such an appliance or fitting it will be in yours and others own interests, to agree. Before you use this appliance or fitting again, have it repaired by a Gas Safe-registered installer.

- **By law, landlords are generally responsible for making sure that gas fittings and flues are maintained in good order and gas appliances and flues are checked for safety once every 12 months. They must also keep a record of the safety checks for at least two years and issue the latest certificate to existing tenants and any new tenants before they move in.**

If you own the appliance, you are responsible for its maintenance and safety checks. However, if you are a Plymouth Community Homes' tenant, we will service these appliances, but you must let us know that you have installed them.

- **By law, with the exception of the room-sealed type, there are restrictions on the installation of gas appliances such as fires, boilers and heaters in sleeping accommodation. These**

restrictions apply only to appliances fitted after 1st January 1996, and to those already installed in rooms in rented accommodation which have been converted to bedrooms after 31st October 1998. Appliances, which are not room-sealed, (e.g. conventional gas fires of 14 kilowatts or less), may only be fitted if they have a device which automatically turns the gas supply off before a dangerous level of fumes can build up.



However, for appliances above 14 kilowatts, only those of a room-sealed type are allowed in such accommodation.

- **By law, since 31st October 1998, it has been illegal to install, in any room, instantaneous water heaters which are not room-sealed or fitted with a safety device which automatically turns the gas supply off before a dangerous level of poisonous fumes can build up.**
- **By law, mains gas transporters/ emergency service providers (ESPs) must, in the event of an emergency, make the situation safe.** They should establish the cause of a gas escape within two hours. In the case of actual or suspected escapes of carbon monoxide they must respond to reports from consumers and make the situation safe.

Getting your gas appliances serviced

If you have gas appliances in your property, we will contact you every year, to let you know when they are due for servicing and arrange an appointment. The appointment will be in the morning or afternoon. If the appointment time is inconvenient, you should arrange another time, using the telephone number provided.

Morning appointments are between 8am and 1pm. Afternoon appointments are between 1pm and 5pm.

If you have arranged for gas appliances to be installed, you must let us know, so that we have an accurate record of appliances in our homes. We will also service these appliances.

You will be sent a customer satisfaction form which we ask you to complete and return (a postage-paid envelope will be included) after servicing has been carried out. We value your comments and the

information you provide will be used to assist us in improving the service.

It is your responsibility to provide access to the property to allow gas appliances to be serviced.

If you miss an appointment to have appliances serviced, it is very important that you contact us to re-arrange a suitable time by:

Telephone:

08082 306500

Emailing via:

www.plymouthcommunityhomes.co.uk

Writing to:

The Gas Servicing Team
Plymouth Community Homes
Prince Rock Depot
Macadam Road
Plymouth
PL4 0RZ

We will continue to try and gain access to your property until appliances have been serviced, so please do not ignore our letters.

If you refuse us access, we will take legal action to obtain access to service the gas appliances, which may result in your eviction for failing to comply with your Tenancy Agreement. If Plymouth Community Homes takes legal action you will be liable to pay legal costs. We will give you warning if we are going to do this.

- It is your responsibility to provide access to the property to allow gas appliances to be serviced.
- If you refuse us access, we will take legal action to obtain access to service the gas appliances.
- If we take legal action, you will be liable to pay legal costs.

Electrical Safety

Get permission first

If you want to fit fixed electrical equipment inside or outside your property, you must get permission from your local housing office, under the terms of your Tenancy Agreement.

All works must be completed, inspected, tested and certified by the equivalent of a National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contractors (NICEIC) approved contractor. Copies of the test certificate for the completed works must be supplied to your housing officer.

You must get permission before you install:

- Security or other additional external lighting.
- Additional socket outlets.
- Any internal lighting and/ or switches.
- Showers.
- Supplies to outbuildings.
- Electrically powered garden features, e.g. water pumps, (pools

which also require permission) as electrical, gas or water services may be present.

Before plugging in electrical tools and equipment especially when outside, always:

- ✓ Use a Residual Current Device (RCD) and test it before use. This automatically switches off the electricity supply to the equipment if there is an earth fault. If the RCD does not work and is part of the fixed supply, do not use electrical equipment and report the fault to Repairs. RCD devices can also be purchased from good DIY stores.
- ✓ Check that the electrical equipment – plugs, sockets, cables, leads – are not worn.
- ✓ Buy good quality electrical equipment from a reputable manufacturer (look for the BEAB label or Kitemark safety symbol).



- ✓ Lay out the leads or cable so that they do not become damaged or a trip hazard.
- ✓ Wear protective clothing and footwear, particularly in damp conditions.
- ✓ Follow the manufacturers' instructions.
- ✓ Uncoil extension leads to prevent overheating.
- ✓ When finished, store electrical equipment in a dry place and out of reach of children.

For your safety, **DO NOT**

- ✗ Clean, adjust or check equipment when it is connected to the electricity supply.
- ✗ Attempt to repair electrical equipment or electrical installations unless you are qualified to do so.
- ✗ Wash equipment when it is plugged in. Always unplug it and use a dry cloth.
- ✗ Use electrical equipment when barefoot or wearing sandals.

- ✗ Leave plugged in electrical equipment unattended.
- ✗ Work on metal steps or ladders when using electrical equipment.
- ✗ Leave trailing cables where they could be a hazard to others (e.g. communal areas or stairwells) or across sinks or puddles.

If in any doubt, call Plymouth Community Homes' Electrical Servicing Section on 08082 306500.

Asbestos in your home

Facts about asbestos – where it may have been used and what to do if you find it in your home.

We gratefully acknowledge that this information is based upon the booklet Asbestos in the Home, published by the former Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in 1999.

Introduction

This information addresses concerns and questions about asbestos in homes. It explains what it is, where it is found, why it might be a problem, and how to deal with it.

Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This has led to their use in a wide range of building materials and products, often as fireproofing.

Properties built since the mid 1980s are very unlikely to contain asbestos in the fabric of the building. Properties built after 1990 are extremely unlikely to contain asbestos anywhere in the building. Asbestos cement has been widely used as a cladding material and can still be found in garages and sheds.

Why may asbestos be a problem?

When asbestos materials age or become damaged they can release fibres into the air. These can be breathed deep into the lung

where they may stay for a long time, causing possible damage. When very high levels of these fibres are breathed in, there is a risk of lung diseases, including cancer.

People who have worked with asbestos for many years as part of their job, or have washed the dusty clothing of those who have worked with asbestos are most likely to be affected. Workplace regulations now protect such people.

Is everyone exposed to asbestos?

There is a low level of fibres in the air everywhere because asbestos has been used widely. Exposure to this low level of fibres is unlikely to harm people's health.

Levels of fibres may be higher in buildings containing asbestos materials, especially where the materials are damaged. It is very unlikely that the levels of asbestos fibres found in buildings will be harmful but if you have damaged asbestos materials in your

home you should seek advice on the appropriate action to take.

High, short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can occur during DIY work. For this reason, try not to raise dust and avoid sanding or drilling when working with materials which might contain asbestos.

Where is asbestos found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1930 to around 1980, particularly from the 1960s onwards. Houses and flats built or refurbished at this time may contain asbestos materials.

Asbestos has also been used in some heat-resistant household products, such as oven gloves and ironing boards. The use of asbestos in these products decreased greatly around the mid 1980s, and since 1993 the use of asbestos in most of these products has been banned.

It is not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos – modern asbestos-free materials often look similar. Remember it is usually older products that contain asbestos.

Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos.

- Try not to raise dust and avoid sanding or drilling when working with materials that might contain asbestos.
- Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos.
- The types of asbestos materials that may be found in homes includes: insulating board, asbestos lagging, sprayed coating, asbestos-cement products, other building materials and products and in heating appliances and domestic equipment.

These are the type of asbestos materials that may be found in homes:

- **Insulating board**

(Asbestos content 20-45%)

Insulating board is used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It is particularly common in 1960s and 1970s system-built housing and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining, bath panels and partitions. It is unlikely to be found in buildings constructed after 1982.

- **Asbestos lagging**

(Asbestos content 55-100%)

Asbestos lagging has been used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings and system-built flats during the 1960s to early 1970s, in areas such as boiler houses and heating plants. Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes, especially those constructed after the

mid 1970s. The use of asbestos for thermal insulation was banned in 1986.

- **Sprayed coating**

(Asbestos content up to 85%)

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection of structural steel and are commonly found in system-built flats built during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building such as service ducts, lift shafts, etc. This stopped in 1974 and the spraying of asbestos has been banned since 1986. Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings or sealed to prevent fibres being released.

- **Asbestos-cement products**

(Asbestos content mainly 10-15%, but sometimes up to 40%)

Asbestos-cement is the most widely used asbestos material. It is found in many types of

building – profiled sheets for roofing and wall-cladding; flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings; bath panels, soffit boards, fire surrounds, flue pipes, cold water tanks; and roofing tiles and slates. It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and also in guttering and drainpipes. Its use has declined since 1976 but asbestos-cement is still being used, particularly in roofing and cladding products. Asbestos-cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because of the way they are made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion. Damage from weathering may also release a small amount of fibres.

- **Other building materials and products**

Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials, for example, in decorative coatings such as textured

paint, plasters and artex. These are still widely in place but supply and application has been prohibited since 1988. Plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felts, tapes, ropes, felts and blankets can also contain asbestos.

- **Heating appliances and domestic equipment**

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters up to 1976, in flameless catalytic gas heaters up to 1988 and some early ‘coal effect’ gas fires. Asbestos has also been used in domestic equipment, such as oven gloves, ironing boards, seals on cooker doors and fire blankets and in brake linings and pads.

How can I identify products or materials containing asbestos?

Since 1976 British manufacturers have put labels on their products to show they contain asbestos



and since 1986 all products containing asbestos carry the European label.

The supplier or manufacturer of a product may be able to tell you if it contains asbestos.

Often homes built at the same time contain similar materials – your neighbours may know if surveys for asbestos have been done.

Plymouth City Council's Environmental Protection Section may be able to help identify if you have asbestos products in your home or if homes in your area have

been surveyed.

Remember, asbestos containing products can look very similar to those not containing asbestos – if in doubt **SEEK ADVICE**.

What should I do if I suspect there is asbestos in my home?

- Asbestos materials which are in good condition and cannot readily be damaged, are often best left where they are because removal can lead to higher levels of fibres in the air for some time. Check the condition of

asbestos materials from time to time to make sure they have not become damaged or started to deteriorate.

If you are planning home improvements or maintenance and have asbestos in your home, always inform builders, maintenance workers or contractors before they start work.

- Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material – **SEEK ADVICE** on the most appropriate action.
- Asbestos materials that are badly damaged or deteriorating can release dust and should be removed. Some asbestos materials (sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards) must always be removed by contractors with a special license issued by the Government. These licensed contractors have to follow regulations to ensure asbestos is safely

removed. Your local environmental health officer should be able to provide advice on asbestos removal and licensed contractors.

Sometimes it is dangerous to have asbestos removed – for instance fire-protection materials – without replacing it with a suitable alternative.

- Prior to undertaking alterations to structure, fixtures and fittings, a Plymouth Community Homes' tenant must receive written permission from us.

Take care when doing DIY

If you have asbestos materials in your home, extra care should be taken in DIY. **DO NOT** attempt work involving sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards. This must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. If in doubt, **SEEK ADVICE**.

If you do any DIY with asbestos materials, take the following precautions:

- Keep other people away from the area of work.
- Wear protective clothing (e.g. disposable overalls), and avoid breathing in asbestos dust (a disposable dust mask 'CE' marked to EN 149 with FFP3 particulate filters is recommended).
- Keep asbestos materials wet to avoid producing dust.
- Work outside if possible and avoid working overhead.
- Do not drill, cut or disturb asbestos unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not scrape or sand asbestos materials before painting and decorating. Some types of asbestos materials are very soft and can release large numbers of fibres if rubbed or scraped.
- Use hand tools rather than power tools.

- Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner to clear up the dust. Hire an industrial vacuum cleaner that conforms to BS 5415 (Type H).
- When you have finished work, clean up and then carefully take off your overalls to avoid raising any dust which may have collected in the fabric.

In the case of disposable overalls, double-bag them, clearly mark **ASBESTOS** on the bag and dispose of them as asbestos waste.

REMEMBER:

- Avoid disturbing or damaging asbestos materials in good condition.
- If you have damaged or deteriorating asbestos materials in your home then **SEEK ADVICE**.
- Do not keep using oven gloves or other small items containing asbestos – dispose of them safely (see section on disposal of asbestos).

- If you think that your warm air heating system, electrical storage heating system or flameless catalytic gas heater, may contain asbestos **SEEK ADVICE** from your local gas or electricity supplier. If they do contain asbestos, do not attempt to dismantle these appliances yourself, but **SEEK ADVICE** from Plymouth Community Homes.

How should I dispose of asbestos?

Wet small amounts of asbestos waste and put it in a strong plastic bag – seal this tightly and clearly mark it **ASBESTOS**.

Do not break up large asbestos-cement sheets – they do not need to be sealed in bags but should be wrapped in polythene or similar sheeting and disposed of as asbestos waste.



Do not put asbestos waste in the dustbin – **SEEK ADVICE** from Plymouth Community Homes about how to dispose of your asbestos waste.

REMEMBER:

- Avoid creating asbestos dust.
- Avoid breathing asbestos dust.
- Asbestos material in good condition should be left alone.
- If you think you may have asbestos containing products in your house, **SEEK ADVICE** from Plymouth Community Homes before you take any action.

Advice from Plymouth Community Homes

If you live in a Plymouth Community Homes' home and want more advice or information on asbestos in your home, please contact the Asbestos Team, Housing and Development.

Owner-occupiers or tenants renting from a private landlord or housing association should contact, Plymouth City Council's Environmental Protection Section.

For asbestos collections contact Plymouth City Council's Waste and Street Services for advice.



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