

BSS Statement – Residential boaters beware of carbon monoxide

The BSS is warning the most vulnerable boaters to take extra care following post mortem confirmation that liveaboard boaters died from carbon monoxide poisoning recently aboard their 25ft GRP cruiser at Norbury Junction on the Shropshire Union Canal.

BSS Manager, Graham Watts said:

“Our records show that residential or intensive users of boats are most at risk from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

If fuel burning appliances are on, or the petrol generator is running, anyone aboard showing the earliest symptoms of being poisoned such as headaches, tiredness, difficulty in thinking clearly and feeling sick, should get off the boat and seek medical help straight away. They must tell the doctor or nurse of their worries about the possible link to CO.”

If you are elderly, pregnant, a smoker, have an existing heart or lung condition, or if you have been drinking, or have young children aboard, you are at greatest risk of being affected and should be especially vigilant.”

Exhaust fumes from petrol generators are particularly nasty. Don't allow any exhaust fumes in the cabin or accommodation spaces, in particular, keep generators well away from cabin openings. Be a good neighbour, don't place your generator where other boaters could be in danger from the exhaust fumes.

All gas heaters, cookers, and oil or solid-fuel appliances need correct installation, routine maintenance and the right operating conditions, as toxic fumes are caused by poor burning.

Boaters who are on board for extended periods should have gas appliances serviced at least once a year by a CORGI registered fitter. It could also be a life saving action to have other appliances, such as solid-fuel stoves, serviced by competent professionals.

Flues in poor condition and flue terminals that are damaged or blocked are potentially putting you at risk. Restricting the air supply will also put you in danger so never restrict the airflow by blocking cabin vents and air-gaps. These appliances need oxygen to feed the flames.

Don't be tempted to place all your reliance on carbon monoxide detectors to keep yourself safe, but do consider fitting a suitable audible alarm as a 'belt and braces' life-saver. Before purchasing, ask the supplier if the alarm is suitable for use in the relatively harsh environment on boats.

For more detail on how to avoid CO happening and what to do if it does, read 'Avoiding the Silent Threat' leaflet from the BSS and for further checks to help stay safe read the Scheme's Essential Guide (follow the links on this website).