

Beware carbon monoxide— It's a silent killer

Gas appliance safety



Creating a safer state
with electricity and gas

Is your home harbouring a **silent killer**?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odourless, colourless gas that can be produced by faulty, unserviced gas heaters. Carbon monoxide poisoning can be fatal or it can cause chronic illness that can go undiagnosed. This brochure tells you how to minimise the risk to you and your family.

Gas heaters must be serviced regularly

Regular servicing of gas heaters is the only way to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning caused by faulty appliances. Energy Safe Victoria and the Victorian Building Authority recommend getting your gas heater serviced at least every two years by a licensed gasfitter with the appropriate equipment to test for carbon monoxide spillage.

What causes it?

Carbon monoxide can be produced in high concentrations if the heater does not completely burn the gas it uses. This can happen for a number of reasons but the most common causes are faults, lack of servicing or a blocked flue. The danger is greater when carbon monoxide is spilling into a bedroom or caravan where the door or windows are tightly sealed, or into a confined space such as a toilet or bathroom. Exhaust fans can also draw carbon monoxide back into your home.

Signs of a faulty heater may include:

- Soot or discolouration around the gas appliance
- Yellow flames (although these are deliberately used for decorative effect in some appliances such as gas log fires)
- The heater going out for no apparent reason
- Debris falling down the flue pipe
- Missing or damaged cowl on the top of the flue pipe.

Every type of gas fuel burning heater should be **serviced regularly**, including central heating units, space heaters, wall furnaces and water heaters.

Landlord and agent responsibilities

The *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* requires landlords and their agents to ensure that rented accommodation is maintained in “good repair”. This includes all gas and electrical appliances provided by the landlord, which must be safe to use and properly maintained. For further information see ESV’s *Landlords and Tenants: Your Responsibilities guide*.

Deadly consequences

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be fatal or cause chronic illness. It is sometimes difficult to diagnose. Symptoms can include:

- Tiredness
- Shortness of breath
- Mild or severe headaches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness and sleepiness.

If the poisoning is extreme it may lead to confusion, loss of consciousness and death. Loss of consciousness can occur quickly if CO concentrations are high.

Some people are especially sensitive to CO. They include people with heart disease, anaemia, young children, unborn babies and the elderly.

Symptoms can occur when using, or immediately after using, a gas appliance.

On average, **one Victorian a year dies from carbon monoxide poisoning** and many more suffer chronic, debilitating illness. In 2010 Vanessa and Scott Robinson lost their two sons, aged six and eight, to carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a faulty gas wall heater in their rented home.

Tip

When choosing a gasfitter to service your heater, ask if they have a **carbon monoxide analyser**. If they don’t have one choose somebody else.

Tell your doctor immediately if carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected.

Take action to protect your family

Have your gas heater serviced a minimum of every two years by a licensed gasfitter. Make sure the gasfitter you choose uses a carbon monoxide analyser.

You can find a gasfitter in the Yellow Pages or your local newspaper.

If you live in rental accommodation make sure your landlord or their agent arranges to have gas heaters serviced regularly.

If your heater shows any signs of problems (including yellow flames, soot or going out after a short time) have it inspected immediately.

For further information go to **www.esv.vic.gov.au** or phone ESV on **1800 652 563**.

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