

We have received the following Advisory Communication from the Boat Safety Scheme in connection with carbon monoxide poisoning incidents that have caused two deaths and two hospitalisations - the latest fatality having happened just before Christmas.

A statement advising boaters to be aware of the dangers of CO is being made to the boating media and a brief article with CO avoidance advice has been placed on the home page of the BSS website. (www.boatsafetyscheme.com)

As you will appreciate, navigation/customer facing teams are potentially in a position to have a key role to help prevent further death and injury. So by way of help, the BSS Office has produced the following short briefing for the waterside workforce, paid or voluntary.

A Boat Safety Scheme leaflet on avoiding carbon monoxide poisoning is also available on the BSS website.

Carbon monoxide (CO) dangers – can you help keep boat crews safe?

Following two recent deaths, the last just days before Christmas, and two major injuries suspected to have been caused by carbon monoxide (CO) the Boat Safety Scheme are offering a short advisory briefing.

People working on the waterways such as patrol officers, river inspectors, rangers, moorings officials, bridge and lock keepers and other staff/colleagues that have dealings with boat owners and crews on the bank-side are potentially in a position to make an immediate impact to improve the safety of boaters in regard to dangers from CO poisoning.

Toxic CO is the by-product gas of burning a carbon based fuel inefficiently. Appliances such as gas fridges and water heaters have a long held reputation as potential sources. Our records show that solid fuel stoves, outboard motors and petrol generators are increasingly responsible for CO related deaths and injuries as patterns of boat usage change. Staying alert to the following scenarios where a brief word of advice and an offer of further information, could make a big difference to the numbers of people affected on our waterways.

Where appropriate, you may wish to take the following **five** actions to help keep boaters safe:

1) Stay alert to the use of portable generators – particularly anywhere generators are being used where the exhaust fumes could build-up and disperse within living/sleeping quarters, for example:

- • Within the cabin space
- • In or close to door/cabin openings
- • On decks covered with sheets, tarpaulins, etc

If a generator (or petrol-engined pump, portable tool, etc) is being used in such a position, please alert the user to the immediate danger and wherever possible leave a BSS carbon monoxide advisory leaflet (see BSS website) with the owner.

2) Be alert to ventilation blocking – pay attention to roof and deck clutter. Where it is noticed that deck/roof clutter is in realistic danger of blocking or restricting vents (e.g. planters, ropes, firewood stacks, coal sacks, etc) please alert the owner to potential danger of CO by the reduced supply of oxygen to the fuel burning appliances.

3) Be alert to flue/flue terminal damage – If a boat with an obviously damaged flue (chimney) or flue terminal is seen, please alert the owner to the potential danger of CO from inefficient flueing that may allow combustion products to spill back into the cabin space.

4) Be alert to indications of early symptoms – Pay attention to boaters mentioning symptoms such as headache, tiredness, difficulty in thinking clearly and feeling sick – particularly if such symptoms ‘vanish’ on leaving the boat. Draw the boaters attention to the possibility and danger of CO poisoning and advise the person to check with NHS Direct via phone or website, or seek other medical advice. Ask the owner to identify any potential cause of CO on his/her boat and if necessary the owner should stop using an appliance and seek professional help with identifying any potential problems and getting the problems remedied.

5) Report all incidents of CO no matter how minor – Please report to Dave Washer or any of the BSS team any incidents of boats with CO spillage whether they are minor or major events. All the information is treated in confidence. It is used only to advance the safety of other boaters. Call 01923 201278 or email bss.enquiries@boatsafetyscheme.com

NOTE: The BSS examination covers a number of items relating to some causes of CO poisoning, however any item that fails these checks will not prevent the issue of a BSS certificate to that boat (unless it is used for hire or other commercial/passenger carrying purposes).

Examiners alert owners to any such defects and in cases of immediate danger will issue a BSS Warning Notice and the BSS CO advisory leaflet. The examiner may also label the appliance and if it is a gas appliance, seek permission to turn off its gas supply (known as making safe).

It is also important to note the examination is a snapshot in time – i.e. the condition of the boat/appliance could have changed the day after the examination was carried out.

The scenarios described above and the BSS examination may help identify obvious CO risks but it remains important that appliances are properly installed and maintained by competent fitters.

In addition to the handing out of our CO leaflets at moorings and on the bankside, any navigation authority or waterway team that is sending out a newsletter this winter/spring can be supplied with leaflets or an article on the subject of CO safety. Please contact the BSS office directly to make a request for such support.

Many thanks in advance for your attention on this important safety issue.