

October Members' Corner

The Undercover Killer!

Steve Parton

Axa Insurance Risk Control Surveyor and
BHSEA Council Member

Mystery solved.....

Dally introduced the Member's Corner speaker for today, Steve Parton, speaking on the subject of Carbon Monoxide poisoning!

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Steve reminded us that carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas that is slightly lighter than air. It has 'affectionately' been called 'The Hidden Killer' and it is a subject that is often ignored by businesses as well as homeowners.

Steve then led us into a 'transcendental state' by asking everyone to close their eyes while he described a typical day for most of us. Everything is normal and then suddenly...the 'Undercover Killer' strikes!



Entering your home and everything begins to change! Steve aroused us from our trance by sounding the alarm of a CO detector. CO, like fire, is a risk in the home, but very few homeowners have installed a detector. And don't forget that it can and does kill! Between 250 and 280 have been killed at work and 50 or so in the home.

What are the Symptoms of CO Poisoning?

Symptoms are described as being flu-like and have therefore often been attributed to something else. Effects are similar to those of a hangover, which also leads to misdiagnosis.

How does CO Occur?

Steve explained that CO is produced by appliances and vehicles or equipment burning fuels e.g. oil burners; wood burners; paraffin heaters (used frequently in garden centres/nurseries); petrol / diesel used in garages; diesel generators; charcoal burners and so on.



CO Poisoning Recent Cases:

Steve described several cases of CO poisoning (see BHSEA website www.bhsea.org.uk for further information), including a case in 2007 involving a father and his son at Tewksbury RFC. Following severe flooding, Bram Lane (64) and his son Chris (27) were using a diesel generator to pump water out of a basement cellar area (confined space) when they were overcome by CO fumes.

What can we all do to avoid CO Poisoning?

- Sweep chimneys.
- Fit an audible CO detector in high risk rooms in the house, i.e. rooms with a gas fire; gas appliances (e.g. in the hall) and possibly the bathroom, and make sure that the detector is tested at recommended intervals. Steve directed Members to a website that provides some basic information with regards to CO detector positioning within rooms:

<http://www.co-bealarmed.co.uk/how-to-stay-safe/fitting-an-alarm>

- Put your boiler in the garage.

What about the Workplace?

- Prepare a CO risk assessment (Steve commented that he had never seen one in all the premises he had visited during the course of his work).
- Check the HSE website to learn more.
- Buy one (good idea as a gift) for Christmas!

Roger Caleb from the National Grid mentioned that the need for fitting CO detectors is important now because homeowners are turning on gas fires for the first time in a long time due to the cold weather. Roger added that people can ring the National Grid on 0800 111 999 for National Grid to come out and check for CO.

Mark Hoare, Health and Safety Manager at the University of Birmingham, and BHSEA Management Committee Member noted that unlike other detectors such as the domestic fire alarm, the CO detector unit has to be changed every 5 years.