

Carbon Monoxide

Practical skills

Why it is undetectable without an alarm, and the symptoms to recognise.

A gas produced by incomplete combustion of any fuel. It binds to haemoglobin far more readily than oxygen, so the blood stops carrying oxygen while the person feels only vaguely unwell.

DETECTABLE
only by alarm

SYMPTOMS
flu-like

CLUE
better when out

- Colourless, odourless and tasteless.
- Sources: gas, oil, wood, coal, charcoal, petrol generators.
- Symptoms resemble flu: headache, nausea, dizziness, confusion.
- A key clue: symptoms improve away from the building.
- Alarms are cheap and should be in any room with a fuel-burning appliance.
- Never run an engine or generator in an enclosed space.

LOOK FOR IT

If everyone in a household has headaches that clear when they go out, suspect carbon monoxide.

Educational reference. If an alarm sounds: open windows, turn off appliances, leave, and call the gas emergency number from outside.