

Press Release

DEKRA experts warn of gas poisoning in the home

Carbon Monoxide – The Silent Death

- ▶ Even the smallest concentration is deadly
- ▶ Caution using charcoal grills, gas boilers, stoves, and pellet stores
- ▶ Have systems serviced and install CO alarms

DEKRA's fire protection experts warn of the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Time and again, serious accidents happen because of defective heating systems, generators, or the indoor use of charcoal grills. Even the smallest concentration of the gas in the air can cause death. As well as exercising caution in connection with the typical hazards, users should install CO alarms to warn if the gas is present in hazardous concentrations.

"Carbon monoxide can be formed in any situation where substances burn incompletely, especially in poorly ventilated rooms where not enough oxygen is present," explains Lars Inderthal, a fire safety expert at DEKRA. "Typical sources are poorly maintained gas boilers, blocked flues in gas heating systems, and defective stoves and fireplaces."

It is also extremely dangerous to use charcoal grills, patio heaters, and generators in indoor spaces. Inadequate ventilation in shisha bars can also result in CO poisoning. Likewise, caution is needed when storing pellets because fresh wood pellets especially can release carbon monoxide. DEKRA recommends installing special CO alarms in all these hazardous areas.

Can one smell carbon monoxide?

Many people incorrectly believe that CO gas can be recognized by its odor. "That is a mistake," emphasizes DEKRA expert Lars Inderthal. "The human senses cannot detect carbon monoxide. It is an odorless and colorless gas that often spreads unnoticed and can even penetrate walls." The first symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, and nausea, which is why people don't always think of poisoning. The hazardous respiratory toxin bonds to hemoglobin in the blood, blocking the supply of oxygen to the body's cells.

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In 2024, 382 people died in Germany due to the toxic effect of CO; 1,834 people were hospitalized for treatment, according to the Germany's Federal Statistical Office. "Many cases of carbon monoxide poisoning are due to human error," says Lars Inderthal. "It is particularly important to use heating systems with care and have them serviced at regular intervals."

It is important to note that CO alarms are no replacement for the smoke alarms required by law. An apartment fire is detected far earlier by a smoke alarm than by a CO alarm.

Protection from CO poisoning

How can consumers protect themselves from CO poisoning? Here are a few tips from DEKRA:

- **Ensure good ventilation:** Wherever coal, wood, gas, oil, petroleum, or alcohol is being burned, it is very important to ensure good ventilation. A constant supply of fresh air is essential and the exhaust air must be removed. This applies as much to private barbecue parties, the use of gas heating systems and coal stoves, and underground garages as to commercial shisha bars, indoor karting centers, and pellet stores.
- **Take care in indoor spaces:** Gas and charcoal grills, gas-fired mushroom and bar heaters, and similar equipment should never be used in indoor spaces. One lethal error that is made time and again is to place a still glowing charcoal grill inside the house to cool.
- **Service heating systems:** Carbon monoxide can be formed by gas boilers and gas or oil heating systems if, for example, the flue is blocked and there is a build up of exhaust gas. Such systems must be serviced regularly by specialist technicians.
- **Install CO alarms:** CO alarms – not to be confused with smoke alarms – emit a warning signal if the CO threshold is exceeded. That means there is a risk to life! It is important to install a CO alarm wherever a substance is being burned. Equally important is testing the alarm's function every four weeks.
- **Tips for alarms:** If a CO alarm goes off, there is no time to lose. You should immediately open several doors and windows to ventilate the room fully. If it is unclear why the alarm has been triggered, you should leave the house immediately and call the fire department (112 in Germany, for example).



About DEKRA

For more than 100 years, DEKRA has been a trusted name in safety. Founded in 1925 with the original goal of improving road safety through vehicle inspections, DEKRA has grown to become the world's largest independent, non-listed expert organization in the field of testing, inspection, and certification. Today, as a global partner, the company supports its customers with comprehensive services and solutions to drive safety and sustainability forward. In 2025, DEKRA generated revenue of 4.4 billion euros. More than 48,000 employees are providing qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries across five continents. DEKRA holds a Platinum rating from EcoVadis, placing it among the top 1% of the world's most sustainable companies.