



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

Title	Reinforcing Carbon Monoxide (CO) Safety
Reference	01/26
Issued date	8 June 2026
Issued by	UK Lead Volunteer for Safe Scouting and Executive Director for Operations
Audience	Lead Volunteers and Trustee Boards of Groups, Districts and Counties

Issue

Recently, we've responded to a Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report following the tragic death of a Scout Leader in 2017 due to Carbon Monoxide (CO) exposure. [Our response has now been published by HM The Coroner.](#)

Learning plays a key part in how we respond to incidents and how we can try to prevent incidents from occurring again. Therefore, we're also issuing a Safety Alert and Learning Notice. The findings highlight critical learning for all members and reinforce the need to make sure that CO risks are consistently understood and effectively controlled in practice.

Safety Alert and Learning Notices form part of our ongoing work to strengthen the safety culture across Scouts. They're designed to inform and share learning from incidents and near misses, and to provide key information, such as recalls or safety concerns, so volunteers, including Trustees and Lead Volunteers, can act promptly. Learn more about how we use [Safety Alert and Learning Notices at Scouts.](#)

Summary

This Safety Alert and Learning Notice has been issued to support understanding of the risks associated with CO, signpost learning, and, where needed, prompt local action and support. CO remains a foreseeable, potentially fatal hazard, particularly during camps, nights away activities, and when carbon-fuel-burning equipment is used in buildings or temporary settings.

Actions required

We are now asking Trustee Boards and Lead Volunteers for their support to:

- Reaffirm their knowledge around the risks of CO poisoning
- Confirm that practices for CO safety are understood and applied by their volunteer teams
- Review and, where needed, improve CO safety information displayed using the [TSA CO-awareness poster](#) at meeting places, campsites and activity centres

You are asked to focus on turning this learning into everyday practice. If anything in this notice or the guidance feels unclear, or you're unsure how to complete the actions, please pause and seek support from your District Safety Lead or County/Area/Region Safety Advisor. They're there to help.

If you need further support, please reach out to the UK HQ Safety team via safety@scouts.org.uk.



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

Reaffirming knowledge of carbon monoxide risks

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas produced when fuels burn without enough oxygen.

It poses a serious health risk and can be fatal.

CO is slightly lighter than air, so it mixes freely with air and does not sink to the floor or rise to the ceiling. It is extremely difficult to recognise because it has no colour, smell or taste. This means you can breathe it in without knowing.

Depending on the concentration and length of exposure, CO may affect someone within minutes or take longer. In all situations, it will cause serious ill health and possibly death. Raising awareness of CO and the symptoms to look out for is a vital safety control.

In your [risk assessment](#), include hazards and controls, along with your plans for how to respond to incidents, making sure that everyone knows what actions to take in an emergency.

Volunteers should feel confident to pause an activity, challenge unsafe setups, and take immediate action if there is concern about CO or any other safety risks.

Scouts have partnered with the Gas Safe Charity and Gas Distribution Networks to deliver [Think CO: Carbon Monoxide Awareness for Scouts](#) learning for all volunteers to develop their understanding and knowledge of CO and how small actions can make a difference.

You can find more help and advice by visiting our webpages:

- [Carbon monoxide guidance](#)
- [Liquified petroleum gas \(LPG\) safety guidance](#)

Recognising carbon monoxide poisoning

CO cannot be detected by human senses, so people will not realise they are being exposed.

Common symptoms	Warning signs that should raise concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Dizziness or light-headedness • Nausea or vomiting • Tiredness or unusual fatigue • Shortness of breath • Confusion or difficulty concentrating • Chest pain • Collapse or loss of consciousness (severe cases) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several people could become unwell at the same time • Symptoms improve in fresh air and return when indoors • Animals becoming unwell first or more severely • Illness during or after use of carbon-based fuel-burning equipment • Symptoms after sleeping in or near areas where carbon-based fuel has been used

Children, pregnant women, older people, and those with conditions such as coronary heart disease, angina, asthma or anaemia are particularly at risk of harm.



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

Carbon Monoxide (CO) Safety practices are understood and applied

CO is a deadly gas you can't see, smell or taste, so it's important we all follow some simple safety steps whenever we're cooking or using fuel-burning equipment.

Key seven safety reminders

1. **Don't use** carbon-based fuel appliances in enclosed spaces or sleeping areas
2. **Do not** use cooking equipment for heating (e.g. to warm tents or shelters)
3. **Always** make sure there is good ventilation when cooking or heating. If you feel unwell (e.g. headache, sleepiness or dizziness), get outside immediately.
4. **Only** use safe, well-maintained equipment – inspect hoses, regulators and seals before each use. If damaged or unsure, don't use.
5. **Make sure** an in-date, tested and working CO alarm (to BS EN 50291-2, suitable for non-fixed environments such as tents and caravans) is in place wherever a carbon-based fuel appliance is used, including gas appliances.
6. **If unsure – STOP!** Evacuate if necessary and seek advice
7. Always lead by example by exhibiting safe behaviours to our young people and volunteers

Stay alert – things can change

Risk can increase if:

- You're using different equipment such as a borrowed gas stove or lamp, that you are not used to
- You're in a new or unfamiliar location
- Conditions change such as weather, site layout, or spaces becoming more enclosed

Take a moment to stop and reassess if anything changes.

What should you do if a Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarm goes off?

Act immediately, do not wait:

- Move everyone into fresh air straight away.
- Turn off any fuel-burning equipment if it is safe to do so.
- Call emergency services and seek medical advice.
- **Do not** re-enter the area until it has been checked and made safe.
- Remember, the appliance can continue to give off CO after it has been put out.

Know the sound of your CO alarm. It makes a different noise to a fire alarm, so make sure you can recognise it.



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

Review and improve Carbon Monoxide (CO) safety information on display

Take a moment to check the safety information you already have on display and make sure it's clear, visible and up to date.

- Make sure your Premises Poster ([Purple Card poster](#)) is displayed clearly (e.g. near your main meeting area or entrance) and that the details are completed
- Check that any existing CO/gas safety posters or signs are easy to see and still relevant
- Replace anything that's damaged, missing or out of date

Please note: we are continuing to improve the resources available for you. Over the coming months, new CO warning stickers will be made available and a new, simplified, visually-led poster that improves understanding for those with visual learning styles or preferences will be made available.

Review what you already have in place and plan where new safety materials will be displayed.

You can [download the current CO safety poster](#).



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

Supporting volunteers who may need additional advice or support

Some volunteers may need extra reassurance, guidance, and support to make learning accessible, or bridge knowledge gaps, especially those just beginning their volunteer journey with us at Scouts, or volunteers or Network members aged 18 to 24.

Trustees and Lead Volunteers are encouraged to think about how local arrangements can:

- **Foster open questions and discussions about CO risks:**
 - Reassure newer volunteers that no question is too basic
 - Pair new volunteers with a volunteer with appropriate experience to support them
- **Share and discuss guidance in an accessible and easy-to-understand way:**
 - Use our [CO awareness poster](#) and [Safe Camping YouTube video](#) to help.
 - Pitch conversations to the experience level of the room
 - Walk through guidance together, don't just email it
 - Pictures and visuals are a strong tool to support help understanding
 - Signpost to specific website guidance pages
 - Remember, CO is a hazard that many, including experienced adults, may be unfamiliar with
- **Bridge confidence gaps to prevent lapses in safety, especially before Nights Away or when taking on new responsibilities:**
 - Enable and set up opportunities for newer volunteers to shadow volunteers with appropriate experience
 - Practise setting up stoves or lamps before events and camps
 - Use the Nights Away Permit Scheme as a coaching process and an opportunity to share good knowledge and practices
 - Add CO and ventilation prompts to pre-camp checklists
- **Be active in supporting your 18–24 members:**
 - Network members aren't always volunteers
 - Check in with them directly; they may not feel they can ask in front of peers
 - Offer the same support and advice routes available to any adult volunteer
- **Use your County/Area/Region Safety Adviser and District Safety Lead for support:**
 - Make sure volunteers know they can raise questions and get help outside of their immediate team
 - Take the opportunity to use your County Safety Adviser/District Safety Lead as a coach, not just an escalation route for safety issues or concerns



Safety Alert and Learning Notice

Reference: 01/26

What you need to do next

This notice shares important information to help reduce the likelihood of the risk of Carbon Monoxide (CO) incidents on premises, at camps and during activities to keep volunteers, young people, staff, and visitors safe.

To support this, Trustee Boards and Lead Volunteers, along with their teams, are asked to review and complete the checklist below. These actions are an important part of making sure the information and guidance in this notice are understood and put into practice locally.

Checklist

Please complete the following actions no later than **30 September 2026**:

- Display the [Carbon Monoxide \(CO\) Safety Poster](#) clearly within all relevant premises and activity locations.
- Make sure volunteers are signposted to the Think CO: Carbon Monoxide Awareness for Scouts learning.
- Make sure volunteers know where to access the CO and gas safety guidance.
- Confirm that CO hazards, related controls, and mitigation measures are included within risk assessments for premises, camps, and relevant activities.
- Make sure any emergency procedures clearly set out what to do in the event of a suspected CO or gas incident.
- Confirm that suitable and compliant CO detection arrangements are in place for permanent premises, as well as temporary, mobile, or camp settings where applicable.
- Make sure all gas appliances are serviced regularly (as a minimum annually), by a registered Gas Safe engineer.
- Where applicable, provide targeted reminders and awareness information about CO risks and hazards to higher-risk age groups, including Explorers and Network members.

Recording your actions

Thank you for your support to deliver these actions. Please record within your Trustee Board and operational team meeting minutes, confirmation that you have:

- Received this notice
- Reviewed the information and guidance
- Taken the relevant actions

You are not required to inform District, County/Area/Region, National or UK HQ Scouts that you have done these actions.