

Dangers of Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide has no taste or smell, therefore it can often be unnoticeable until it's too late; and unfortunately, in NZ there have been a number of deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning that could have been avoided.

A recent tragedy where a young boy is reported to have died due to carbon monoxide poisoning highlights the need for gasfitters to be vigilant when carrying out and inspecting gasfitting.

There are actions that gasfitters can take to ensure gas installations meet the compliance requirements in AS/NZS 5601, which will help prevent tragedies like this happening in the future.

Common reasons where New Zealanders have died from carbon monoxide poisoning include, outdoor appliances being used inside, lack of maintenance on appliances and appliances being used in confined spaces. However, the reasons can generally be boiled down to two main causes:

1. Incomplete combustion
2. Inadequate or absent ventilation

It is important that gasfitters do their due diligence when installing and maintaining gas appliances. It may be that there is no issue with their installation at the time of completion but in the meantime, the property has had other work done which now affects the gasfitting. For example, a heat transfer system may have been installed, which then causes negative pressure, which can cause incomplete combustion or the products of combustion to enter an enclosed space. Alternatively, the homeowner may have covered the ventilation, which can prevent adequate air for complete combustion or allow the products of combustion to build up in the space.

If the existing gasfitting is non-compliant, good practice is to let the homeowner know about the matter, this is best done in writing. That way you have a record of what you have advised them.

If the existing installation is unsafe and the gas is turned off, then the gasfitter should not turn the gas back on until the installation is made safe. See the Gas (Safety and Measurement) Regulations 2010 (GSMR) regulation 9(2).

If there is an immediate danger to life or property i.e. GSMR regulation 10, the gasfitter must as soon as practicable notify:

1. the owner or occupier of the property where the danger exists; and
2. WorkSafe.

You must also advise the owner or occupier to inform the gas retailer of the danger.