

Boat Safety Scheme
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Put bluntly, if you can smell petrol-engine exhaust fumes in the boat, kill the engine(s) and get out fast before you inhale any further toxic fumes!

A major carbon monoxide (CO) risk comes from either big inboard petrol-engines producing lethal volumes of the highly poisonous gas in seconds, or from outboards and other portable engines steadily increasing CO in the cabin; but whatever the source, boaters cannot afford to drop their guard says the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS).

Over the previous two boating seasons four people died and another two had emergency medical treatment when the cabins of their cruisers, with large inboard petrol engines, filled with a toxic cloud of CO as engine-exhaust gases were drawn inside through the open flaps of cockpit covers.

Graham Watts the BSS manager said:

‘The warning is targeted at owners of boats with large petrol engines and focuses on the risk when boat engines are run whilst the craft is moored.

‘Investigations by the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) have demonstrated how exhaust gases from petrol engines can flow back inside through slightly open flaps on cockpit covers.

‘The gaps in the covers can act like a funnel to channel exhaust fumes into the covered cockpit area, and then fill the boat interior with a massive volume of CO in seconds.

‘CO measured in hundreds of parts per million in air can kill in minutes or hours, the MAIB tests recorded CO in thousands of parts per million in less than half a minute.

‘Do not think that it is OK to have petrol engine exhaust fumes in your covered cockpit area or cabin - act immediately!

‘No amount of CO should be thought of as safe, even low concentrations over longer periods can cause long-term health problems.’

‘Good skippers will understand and control all risks to protect their crews. This includes knowing about CO and being able to recognise the symptoms of CO poisoning.’

Over the past 20 years, 19 boaters have died and a further 21 were sent to hospital when CO in exhaust fumes from inboard, outboard and generator engines entered the boat.

CO is a colourless and odourless gas, but when it is mixed with the other petrol engine exhaust gases that you can smell, you can be confident there is a risk you need to deal with immediately.

The symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to flu or food poisoning as the toxin begins to take effect, these include headaches, nausea and dizziness.

As time passes and, or the amount of CO builds, symptoms can worsen with chest pains and breathlessness and go on to seizure, unconscious. So the early recognition of the symptoms is critical, but if nothing is done, death can follow on quickly.

Because of circumstances where you may not smell the exhaust fumes, or you are asleep, it is critical to have a working certified CO alarm as the next line of defence.

Even if your batteries are desperate for a charge, don't run an engine on a moored boat if the exhaust fumes are being drawn inside. Wait until the wind changes or move to a different mooring.

Be a good neighbour and don't run petrol engines where exhaust fumes could enter a nearby boat cabin.

These are the critical points

- If you are smelling and breathing in petrol-engine exhaust fumes, stop the engine and get off the boat.
- Know the symptoms of CO poisoning, if anyone is indicating they are suffering, get them medical help. If the symptoms are severe – call the emergency services.
- As a belt & braces defence, have one or more certified CO alarms (BS EN 50291-2). They need testing routinely and never remove the batteries.

Barry Sheerman, MP for Huddersfield and Co-chair of All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) is supporting the need for boaters to understand more about CO and promotes the BSS information.

'As Co-chair of the All-Party parliamentary CO group I am delighted to support the initiative of the Boat Safety Scheme to protect people from carbon monoxide poisoning. We have identified the growing number of CO related boating incidents as a worrying and emerging trend. The Boat Safety Scheme and the APPCOG are determined prevent any further incidents of this kind'.

More information about staying safe from CO on boats is available at www.boatsafetyscheme.org/co

- ENDS -

The **Boat Safety Scheme**, or BSS, is a public safety initiative owned by the Canal & River Trust and the Environment Agency. Its purpose is to help minimise the risk of boat fires, explosions, or pollution from boats harming visitors to the inland waterways, the waterways' workforce and any other people on or near the waterway. Journalists seeking further information about the BSS should contact communications manager, Rob McLean at robert.m@boatsafetyscheme.org

The **All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG)** is the leading forum for Parliamentarians from both the Houses of Commons and Lords, to work together to discuss ways of tackling carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, to improve government policy on carbon monoxide safety, and to raise public awareness of the threat posed by deadly CO gas.

The **Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB)**, is a branch of the United Kingdom Department for Transport, which can investigate any vessel related accident occurring in UK waters and accidents involving UK registered ships worldwide. Investigations are strictly limited to establishing cause, promoting awareness of risks and preventing recurrence. The reports do not apportion blame and do not establish liability. The choice of which accidents are investigated is made on the basis of the scope of the safety lessons which may be learned as a result of the investigation.

<https://www.gov.uk/maib-reports/carbon-monoxide-poisoning-on-board-the-motor-cruiser-love-for-lydia-with-the-loss-of-2-lives>

<https://www.gov.uk/maib-reports/carbon-monoxide-poisoning-on-motor-cruiser-vasquez-with-loss-of-1-life>