

Boat Safety Scheme
First Floor North, Station House,
500 Elder Gate,
Milton Keynes, MK9 1BB

T: 0333 202 1000

Email: bss.enquiries@boatsafetyscheme.org

Website: www.boatsafetyscheme.org



Sept 2014

NR 004.14

You cannot afford to put gas safety on the back burner (Gas Safety Week 15-21 September)

'Let there be no repeat, boaters must respect their gas appliances'; says the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) during national Gas Safety Week 2014 in remembering last winter's twin fatalities from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning on a small commercial fishing boat in Whitby harbour.

According to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) report on fv Eshcol, the sleeping victims died in their bunks from the highly toxic fumes given off by a poorly maintained LPG-burning cooker used incorrectly as a heater to warm the accommodation space and there was no CO alarm to wake them.

Problems start when carbon-based fuels including butane and propane, don't burn completely, and CO is produced as a by-product.

CO will spread round the relatively small space of a cabin quickly, unseen and un-smelt, silently filling a boat with a gas that chemically attacks its victims by replacing oxygen in the bloodstream, preventing essential supplies to tissues, heart, brain and other vital organs.

It can and has killed in minutes. Even where victims survive severe CO poisoning they can be left with long-term brain damage such as poorer concentration, or mood swings and other effects

It's not safe at any concentration, breathing-in lower levels of CO over a longer period can lead to memory problems and difficulty concentrating.

There are some common threads to incidents of CO poisonings on boats, these are:

- faulty equipment,
- poor or overdue maintenance,
- misused appliances,
- early symptoms of poisoning are missed or ignored,
- no working CO alarm.

Typically CO occurs when flues are damaged; burners are faulty; there is blocked ventilation or a shortfall of air - fuels need the right amount of oxygen to burn safely

Early signs of poisoning include, headache and bad temper; feeling sick and dizzy; feeling tired and confused; stomach pains, being sick and these can quickly develop into more serious effects

Continues over...

Cont/d...

Graham Watts, BSS manager, offered these tips to keep boaters safe when using gas appliances:

1. Have all gas appliances and systems installed competently
2. Have gas appliances checked and serviced routinely
3. Use the equipment correctly
4. Never block the ventilators, without a good oxygen supply CO can be produced
5. Deal with any equipment problems immediately
6. Don't allow bodged repairs and maintenance
7. Install a CO alarm certified to BS EN 50291-2
8. Test the alarm routinely
9. Never remove the batteries
10. Know the signs of CO poisoning and how to react.

Fitters competent and registered to fit LPG systems on boats can be found easily on www.gassaferegister.co.uk by using the advanced search options to select LPG on boats.

He added:

'Remember CO alarms only protect if they are working, they and/or their batteries should be replaced if they do not work when tested, or if the replacement date marked on the alarm has passed.'

Information on recognising the signs of CO poisoning and how to react; where to fit CO alarms and for the latest CO safety advice is available on www.boatsafetyScheme.org/co – Don't let CO ruin your life.

- ENDS -

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Gas Safety Week – Gas Safety Week is a national safety campaign to raise awareness of gas safety across the millions of UK gas users. It is co-ordinated by Gas Safe Register with support from the gas industry including retailers, manufacturers, consumer bodies, the public and in this matter, the Boat Safety Scheme.

Gas Safety Week 2014 will take place 15-21 September 2014 – www.gassafetyweek.co.uk

Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) examines and investigates all types of marine accidents to or on board UK ships worldwide, and other ships in UK territorial waters.

The role of the MAIB is to contribute to boating safety by determining the causes and circumstances of marine accidents and working with others to reduce the likelihood of such accidents recurring in the future. Accident investigations are conducted solely in the interest of future safety. The Branch does not apportion blame and it does not establish liability, enforce laws or carry out prosecutions.

MAIB Safety Bulletins are produced when urgent safety issues emerge during the course of an investigation and the Chief Inspector of the MAIB decides to disseminate this important information in advance of the main investigation report being produced.

Lessons from the scallop-dredger Eshcol incident are published on the Safety Bulletins page of the MAIB website - www.maib.gov.uk/publications/safety_bulletins.cfm

The BSS is a public safety project owned jointly by the Canal & River Trust, registered as a charity with the charity number 1146792, and the Environment Agency. At least 14 other navigation and harbour authorities have also adopted it. The navigation authorities' purposes for the Scheme are to help reduce the risks of fire, explosion and pollution on small craft. This is done by promoting fire safety and pollution avoidance advice to help boat owners keep themselves and their crews' safe as well as regular examination of fuel systems, gas systems, electrical systems and appliances. The BSS is responsible for the administration and supervision of the BSS examination scheme.

Rob McLean, communications manager, Boat Safety Scheme – 07710 175478