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June 2018

NR 003.18

Choosing the right CO alarm could be the best purchase you ever make but be aware of false claims!

Following media reports this June about non-working imported carbon monoxide (CO) alarms sold on internet shopping sites, the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) is cautioning boaters, that choosing the right CO alarm is an especially critical decision as boats can fill in minutes, sometimes seconds, with lethal levels of the highly toxic gas.

The BSS has teamed up with the CoGDEM (Council of Gas Detection & Environment Monitoring) to urge boaters to choose one from the list of CO alarms suitable for boats as recommended by the makers of independently certified products – the list can be found on the home page of the BSS website.

Incident reports collected by the BSS show that properly certified CO alarms have repeatedly protected skippers and crews from the hidden dangers of CO and ought to be regarded as part of the boat's essential safety equipment.

The advice is to buy alarms that have been independently tested and certified by British Standards Institution (BSI), look for the Kitemark on the alarm or packaging or the Loss Prevention Certification Board, look for the LPCB Certification Mark.

CO alarms certified to BS EN 50291-2 are the best choice for boats, but if you have a CO alarm, BSI or LPCB certified to BS EN 50291, or 50291-1, CoGDEM's advice is to keep it, test it routinely and when it needs replacing, choose a unit certified to BS EN 50291-2.

BSS Manager, Graham Watts said:

Reports of new alarms, not working out of the box is very concerning, so our advice to anyone worried that they have bought a non-functioning alarm for their boat, is to reassure themselves by looking for the Kitemark or LPCB Certification Mark.

Leigh Greenham, Director and Administrator at CoGDEM added:

We cannot stress enough that CO alarms are vital pieces of life saving equipment, but only independently tested and certified alarms should be trusted to do this most important of jobs.

There's no substitute for the good installation, regular maintenance and correct use of fuel burning appliances and engine systems, but if despite these steps, CO still occurs, boaters can have confidence in independently certified alarms protecting them and their fellow crew members.

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CO is produced when carbon-based, appliance and engine fuels, such as gas, LPG, coal, wood, paraffin, oil, petrol and diesel don't burn completely.

It cannot be seen, smelt, tasted, or felt, that's why it's known as the silent killer!

When you breathe in CO, it replaces the oxygen in your bloodstream, preventing essential supplies to your body tissues, heart, brain and other vital organs.

Survivors of severe CO poisoning may be left with severe long-term neurological problems, with disturbances in memory, language, cognition, mood and behaviour, as can some people exposed to lower, non-lethal concentrations of the toxic gas.

Alarms not only warn people about immediately dangerous amounts of CO, they can alert people to the presence of the lower, but still health affecting, levels.

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

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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

CoGDEM (The Council of Gas Detection & Environmental Monitoring) is the UK trade body for companies and experts in the field of gas detection. CoGDEM provides its expertise to UK, European and global standards-writing bodies, and provides technical guidance and support to all CO awareness-raising projects and organisations, including the HSE. www.cogdem.org.uk Media contact: Rob Lyon, Playfair Marketing
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