

# Northern Ireland takes the lead in eliminating 'the silent killer'

Submitted by: Sprue Safety Products Ltd

Thursday, 25 October 2012

---

Northern Ireland is the first country in the UK to take an important step forward in protecting its residents and tenants against the potentially fatal dangers of carbon monoxide (CO).

Changes to Northern Ireland's Building Regulations come into force from October 31st, making it a legal requirement to fit carbon monoxide alarms in all dwellings where a new or replacement combustion appliance – such as a boiler or solid fuel stove - is to be installed.

At a special Roundtable event held in Belfast this month, delegates welcomed these changes as significant progress in the fight to eliminate the dangers of this deadly gas. However, all agreed that more still needs to be done in raising awareness of the risks and consequences of carbon monoxide if more deaths are to be prevented.

Hosted by home safety products specialist, Sprue Safety Products (<http://www.sprue.com>), the event brought together representatives from housing associations, councils and health organisations in the Province to discuss and understand the impact of this latest legislation with speakers from Building Control Northern Ireland, Gas Safe Register, The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) and the charity Gis A Hug Foundation.

Billy Gillespie and Patrick Hobson from Building Control Northern Ireland opened the discussion by outlining the new regulations; and in particular Part L covering combustion appliances and flues. Summarising the changes, Billy and Patrick looked at how these changes could impact on housing associations.

Catherine and Jonny McFerran set up the Gis A Hug Foundation in memory of their son Neil and his lifelong friend Aaron Davidson, who both died from carbon monoxide poisoning in 2010. Catherine welcomed the new regulations as a positive step forward, but said it was disappointing that the rest of the UK is not going in the same direction. "Awareness needs to be out there," she said.

It is estimated that only 16% of homes in the UK have CO detectors, yet an average of one person every week is still killed by this toxic gas and nearly five million experience dangerous levels in their homes each year.

The danger is - with no taste or smell - carbon monoxide is undetectable to the human senses and because symptoms are often mistaken for other ailments such as flu, its presence can go unnoticed until it's too late. Even low levels over a few hours can be as lethal as high levels over a short amount of time, causing lasting damage to your health.

Badly fitted or poorly serviced boilers, stoves, fires and water heaters, or blocked chimney vents can all produce carbon monoxide. The gas can also enter a property from external sources such as adjoining households or garages.

Fuel poverty is a major issue in Northern Ireland which in turn can put more people at risk of CO poisoning. Conor McCleave, health and safety officer at Belfast City Council, explained that 72% of households in the region have oil-fired heating, but with the ever increasing price of oil, many sacrifice heating to put meals on the table. With little or no knowledge of the dangers of carbon monoxide, these people are unlikely to prioritise getting their heating appliances checked or serviced, or installing a CO alarm to warn them of any lethal leaks.

Belfast City Council has been running a successful campaign of seasonal events to raise awareness of carbon monoxide, where people are given advice and information. "Education and awareness-raising activities are vital, particularly in areas of high deprivation," added Conor.

Proper installation and regular servicing of all gas or oil appliances should dramatically reduce any dangers, but even well serviced equipment can go wrong and flues can become blocked between inspections. In the winter months, there is also the danger that increased pressure on domestic heating systems in cold weather can leave unchecked boilers prone to faults, which can result in potentially lethal CO leaks.

James Murray from Gas Safe Register said: "If we could ensure everyone has their appliances safety checked every year, more people would be safe from carbon monoxide. CO alarms are only a second line of defence, but vital to alert you of its presence."

Billy Gillespie from Building Control Northern Ireland emphasised the importance of ventilation:

"People can be so inventive when it comes to keeping heat in, but they don't realise that by blocking flues and vents they could potentially seal any carbon monoxide inside their home. Many may also think that switching on an extractor is ventilating the room, but some fans can draw in dangerous combustible air from flues. More modern appliances can be made to draw in air from outside rather than from within the room, which is much safer and a major consideration in building or refurbishment projects."

There are many myths and misconceptions surrounding carbon monoxide and its symptoms, ranging from how the gas is produced to where a CO alarm should be fixed. Ideally, a detector should be installed in every room where there is a fuel burning appliance, as well as in rooms where occupiers spend most of their time, such as the living room and bedroom.

Many people assume they're not at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning because they don't have a boiler. James Murray added: "Our remit and expertise is gas, but the CO risks are there with other fuels too."

Catherine and Jonny from Gis A Hug work tirelessly to get these life-saving messages out to as many people as possible. They also give out FireAngel carbon monoxide alarms to more vulnerable groups including the elderly and those with restricted incomes.

"Good progress has been made with new builds," said Catherine. "But so much more needs to be done, particularly with other groups who are potentially at greater risk, including students and the elderly."

Billy Gillespie agreed: “We need to continue to highlight the dangers of carbon monoxide and keep this in the spotlight so people talk about it. That way more will understand the risks, symptoms and how to stay safe. The regulations don’t yet apply retrospectively, so there will still be many older appliances in use that are possibly in greater need of checks.”

James Murray agreed: “In some ways social housing has better protection as the legislation requires compliance, but private landlords are not regulated in the same way.”

Making a comparison to previous changes in the law on disabled access, Billy added: “This latest change is a big step forward in legislation to protect people. The laws on disabled access show that it’s only when recommendations are written into legislation that people comply.”

Delegates agreed that installers can play a vital role in educating people of the dangers of CO. Some are already demonstrating good practice by not signing off service work until a carbon monoxide alarm has been fitted and proven to work and others ensure they always take an alarm with them when they visit a property.

The latest changes to Northern Ireland’s Regulations are a sign that CO safety is at last becoming more widely recognised. By keeping carbon monoxide in the spotlight with campaigns to educate people of the risks and symptoms, incidents of poisoning should hopefully fall.

Sprue Safety Products is committed to keeping more people safe from the dangers of fire, smoke and carbon monoxide and supports the work of Gis A Hug in Northern Ireland. For more information on how you can support this organisation, please visit [www.gisahugfoundation.co.uk](http://www.gisahugfoundation.co.uk)

Further guidance on the installation of carbon monoxide alarms is available in BS EN 50292 and from manufacturers’ instructions.

For more information on Sprue’s complete range of carbon monoxide and smoke alarms, visit: [www.sprue.com](http://www.sprue.com) or [www.fireangel.co.uk](http://www.fireangel.co.uk).

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

Sprue Safety Products specialises in designing, manufacturing and supplying products that save lives, with a comprehensive range of products that provide peace of mind and keep you safe.

Sprue Safety Products Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sprue Aegis plc. Sprue Aegis has recently won a prestigious Sunday Times Fastrack Award, which recognises the fastest growing companies in the UK.

About Sprue Aegis plc

Group overview

With its head office in Coventry, UK, Sprue is Europe's leading home safety products supplier and manufactures one of the world's smallest carbon monoxide sensors for use in carbon monoxide alarms. Sprue designs and sells smoke and carbon monoxide alarms including other safety related products throughout Europe under the FireAngel, First Alert, BRK and Dicon brands. Sprue enjoys a strong European market presence, a leading UK retail footprint, is the supplier of choice to the UK's Fire and Rescue Services and continues to develop its market share in the UK's trade sector. Sprue has an established network of independent distributors within Continental Europe providing access into these key growth markets through local partners.

#### Patented technology

Sprue has patented technology in Europe, the US and other selected territories and its range of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms is independently certified to the latest European standards. For further product information, please visit: [www.fireangel.co.uk](http://www.fireangel.co.uk) or [www.firstalert.co.uk](http://www.firstalert.co.uk) or [www.brk.co.uk](http://www.brk.co.uk) or [www.sprue.com](http://www.sprue.com)

#### Company ethos

We make products that save lives. It is a simple philosophy. Everything we do is focussed on providing market leading smoke and carbon monoxide alarms that achieve this objective.

We are serious about carbon monoxide and smoke detection and believe everyone should be properly protected with affordable and reliable home safety products from a company with brands you can trust.

We work with passion and seek to inspire those that work for us in the same way. We encourage our staff to "make a difference" to our business every day.

Date of issue: 24th October 2012

For further media information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Jane Duncan at Sprue Safety Products on: 02476 323232 or email: [jduncan@sprue.com](mailto:jduncan@sprue.com)