

The Public Health Agency, (PHA), is reminding campers of the danger of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from leaving lit or smouldering barbecues inside tents or caravans.



Many people are already aware that fossil fuels and wood, when burnt without enough oxygen, create high levels of CO. However, the PHA is concerned that campers may not be aware of the risks involved with taking lit or smouldering barbecues inside tents, awnings or caravans.

Dr Anne Wilson, Consultant in Health Protection, PHA, advises: “Carbon monoxide is a colourless, tasteless, odourless gas that is non-irritating, and as a result can be very hard to detect. Symptoms of CO poisoning include headaches, nausea and vomiting, exhaustion, drowsiness, dizziness and light-headedness, flu- like symptoms, chest pain and losing consciousness and palpitations, (which is when you feel your heart beat oddly).

“CO poisoning can be fatal and affect anyone, including healthy adults. However, children, older people, pregnant women and anyone with heart or breathing problems are more vulnerable to its effects.

“It is important to remind people camping during a major event that despite being out in the fresh air, carbon monoxide can build up very quickly in enclosed spaces, such as tents and awnings, to levels that can kill. And if cold weather is forecast, campers may be tempted to take barbecues inside.

“Barbecues should never be used or left inside tents or awnings once they have been lit or after they have been used – they should be disposed of safely ensuring all fire and ashes are completely extinguished.

“It is essential that people take care when using barbecues and ensure that they are safe and used in properly ventilated spaces. Anyone who suspects they are suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning while camping should immediately go outside into the fresh air and seek urgent medical attention.”

Carbon monoxide poisoning causes around 50 deaths each year in the UK as well as a number of hospital admissions. It is known as the ‘silent killer’ – you can’t see it, taste it or smell it. Carbon monoxide is released from the burning of carbon-based

fossil fuels including coal, gas, oil, petrol, paraffin, charcoal and wood.

Dr Wilson added: "Carbon monoxide poisoning can be fatal and can also cause long-term health problems if victims are exposed to low doses over a long period of time. The signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often mistaken for other illnesses, such as food poisoning or flu – the symptoms can be similar to flu but without a raised temperature. Please look out for these signs and symptoms and consider if carbon monoxide poisoning could be the cause."

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