

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

Scrutiny Review of Carbon Monoxide Awareness

Executive Summary

The main aim of the review was to gain a wider understanding of the Council's role in raising awareness of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning and the installation of CO alarms. In addition, external organisations, including local registered providers of social housing, were invited to submit evidence on their actions in relation to CO awareness.

Members considered a range of evidence on the causes and consequences of CO poisoning and preventative measures. This review has provided the Committee with the opportunity to highlight and promote CO awareness.

The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas. Its lack of taste and smell can mean a person can become seriously ill before they realise that they have been poisoned by the gas.
- Symptoms of CO poisoning can be likened to flu-like symptoms and can be another reason that poisoning is not detected straight away.
- Advice on how to prevent CO poisoning through the installation of CO alarms was presented to the Committee. Advice on what to do if an individual suspects there has been a CO leak in their property was also included in this review.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team worked with local landlords to raise awareness of CO poisoning and to ensure that landlords adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.
- Notices could be served to private landlords if carbon monoxide alarms were not fitted, or unfit appliances were not replaced, within specific timeframes.
- Representatives from several local registered providers of social housing explained the various methods employed to comply with regulations and their methods of informing tenants about the dangers of CO poisoning to tenants.
- The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) provided information on staff training in CO poisoning awareness and treatment of those affected by CO poisoning.
- Cleveland Fire Brigade provided evidence on the support and advice provided to residents as part of their 'Safer Homes' initiative.

- Members reviewed all the evidence submitted and concluded that legislation should be extended to make it a requirement that CO alarms are installed in all properties, including all types of holiday homes.
- Members also suggested that legislation should be extended to include gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances.
- It was agreed that registered providers should be encouraged to continue to follow best practice and continue to raise awareness of CO poisoning to their tenants.
- The availability of mobile 'mini-detectors' was raised as an option for consideration for those who visit properties as part of their job role.
- Highlighting CO awareness could be publicised, in partnership with Cleveland Fire Service, through existing platforms, especially during the annual Carbon Monoxide Awareness week.

Conclusion

Carbon Monoxide poisoning is a serious issue and one that could affect all residents across the borough. Poisoning can result from faults with gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. The installation of a Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms in the vicinity of such appliances is one preventative measure to reduce the risk of CO poisoning. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Private Sector Housing Team and Environmental Health Team engage in awareness raising of this issue and this includes working with local landlords to adhere to legal requirements in privately rented properties.

The Committee concluded that legislation should be extended to ensure that CO alarms are fitted in all properties, including holiday homes, for gas and solid burning fuel appliances. The Committee also supported the continuation of awareness raising through existing platforms.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend:

1. That correspondence is sent to local MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government urging that legislation is extended to make it a requirement that carbon monoxide alarms are fitted in all properties, and public buildings, such as Community Halls, for gas appliances as well as solid fuel burning appliances. In addition to this, legislation should be extended to make the installation of carbon monoxide alarms in all forms of holiday home, including caravans, with gas and solid fuel burning appliances a legal requirement.
2. That, working with Cleveland Fire Service, information on Carbon Monoxide poisoning be publicised through existing platforms, including Stockton News and through work with schools, to raise awareness as part of carbon monoxide awareness week, including the promotion of mobile 'mini-detectors'.

3. That all Housing Associations are encouraged to follow best practice and to consider using body worn 'mini-detectors' where appropriate when entering other people's homes/dwellings. In addition, the promotion of body worn 'mini-detectors' to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council employees who regularly enter other people's homes/dwellings, such as registered carers.