Schemes to promote gas safety including awareness of carbon monoxide

As you would expect, the safety of our customers, staff and the public at large is our number one priority. Safety is firmly in place in our set of 'core' company values and we look to take both an innovative and creative approach to new safety initiatives and safety communication. We demonstrated this during 2008/09 with the implementation of a number of initiatives, some of which are detailed here.

Customer information leaflets

We developed two leaflets in the year, the first, our own customer safety leaflet and the second, in collaboration with the other three gas network companies and the Energy Networks Association (ENA), a hard-hitting Carbon Monoxide (CO) awareness postcard.

Background

Our engineers visit around one million homes every year which, on the majority of occasions, provides them the opportunity to talk with the householder. This direct contact is an ideal opportunity to provide additional written material which, if just letter-dropped or posted, could be treated as junk mail. The fact it's been given by hand with reassurances from our engineer gives the information much more credibility.

Gas Safety leaflet

This was produced and branded with our two network logos, Southern Gas Networks and Scotland Gas Networks. It contains a range of telephone numbers and advice on gas and CO safety, the key number being the National Gas Emergency number. Basically, we advise the public to call immediately if they smell gas or suspect CO is present. This was issued in bulk to our front-line engineers in August 2008 and so far over 300,000 leaflets have been left with householders. A re-print was carried out in March to take account of the change from Corgi to the Gas Safe Register.

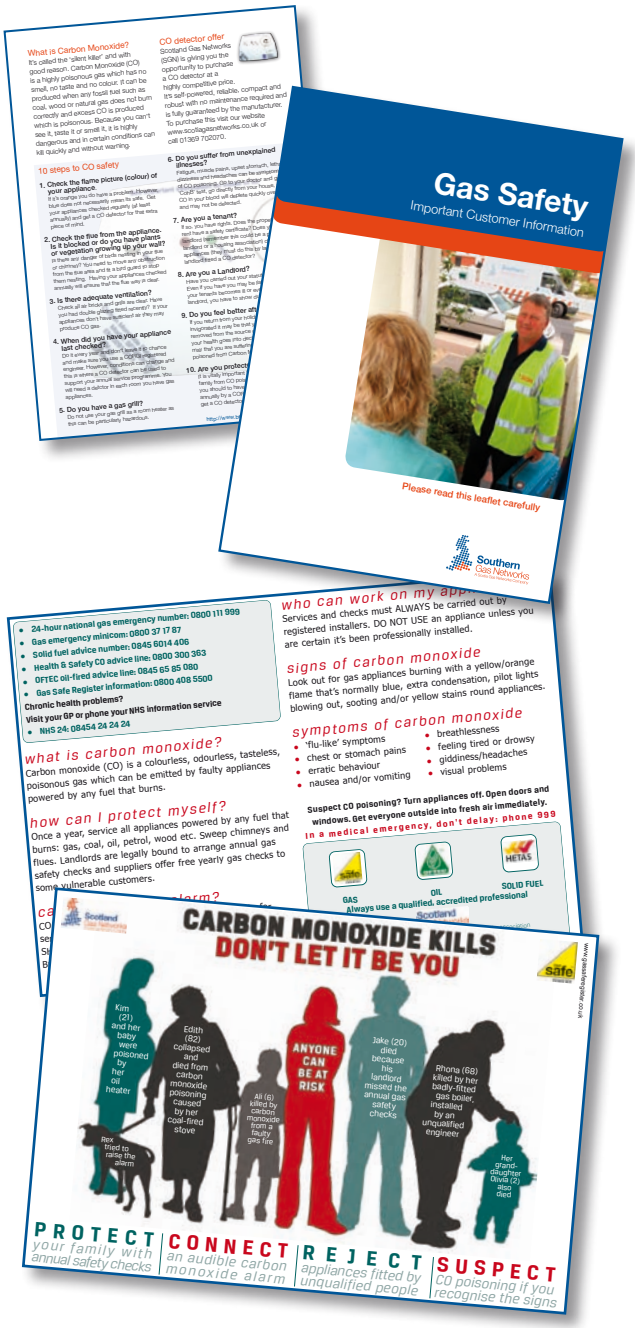
Carbon Monoxide post card

This leaflet was a joint effort between all the gas network companies and the ENA. While it contains advice, relevant contact numbers and website links, the leaflet is different in its approach to anything we've done before. It takes a very 'hard hitting' approach in its use of real case studies. It's deliberately like this and our engineers receive a positive response from householders when handing it out.

We played a key role in the decision to produce the leaflet as well as the design, content and method of distribution. Interestingly, it also makes reference to the CO dangers from fossil fuels other than gas, which is often considered an area in which the general public lack knowledge or awareness.

Benefits

Direct delivery by engineers into hands and homes provides additional credibility and profile for the messages.



Personal Atmosphere Monitors (PAMs)

Background
Known as the silent killer, the odourless, tasteless, colourless Carbon Monoxide (CO) gas can be a threat to our staff and the general public.

Initiative taken
All our people working on emergency and repair work now have a potential lifesaver in their hands, for them and the occupiers of the homes they visit. Each has been issued with a Personal Atmosphere Monitor (PAM) to wear at all times. In the past, every home visited carried with it a risk to the engineer of exposure to CO fumes. Having the ability to instantly identify the presence of CO not only provides engineers with immediate protection, but also very importantly allows them to take immediate action to protect the occupants.

We invested £850,000 in buying PAMs for over 1,000 of our front-line staff, as well as the calibration equipment needed at each of our depots to regularly test and check the units are safe and fully functional.

How it works
The PAM continually monitors the atmosphere for methane and carbon monoxide, as well as oxygen depletion. If it detects anything it immediately warns the wearer of the danger. At predetermined levels it activates with an audible, visual and vibrating alarm to warn the user of an unsafe condition, allowing immediate action to be taken.

Examples
We have many examples where the PAM has provided CO warnings where the visit has been totally unrelated. The CO could emanate from any fossil fuel or indeed be coming from an adjacent property. One such incident was reported in our staff newspaper and this article is reproduced in our supplementary information.

Benefits
It has proven to not only benefit our engineer when visiting homes, but has already benefited a number of occupants who would have continued to receive CO exposure, leading to far more serious consequences. To date, PAMs have sounded on 32 occasions warning of CO and providing this essential early notification.

CO Alarms – Student initiative

Background
Without the necessary precautions and care, anyone is a potential victim of CO poisoning. One group that's been identified over the years as particularly vulnerable are students staying away from home in rented accommodation. They are considered to be at risk from both low awareness of the dangers and poorly maintained gas appliances and associated fluing and ventilation.

Initiative taken
We decided to pilot a scheme to support students with practical assistance to help them stay safe. We've made available free CO detectors to accommodation service contacts, initially within three further education institutions in Scotland, namely St Andrews University, The University of the West of Scotland (Paisley), and Edinburgh's Telford College. Each has between 1,000 and 3,000 students in private rented accommodation. Just how 'CO' safe these properties are is unknown. However, our objective with the pilot scheme was to provide practical support and raise awareness (our new CO awareness leaflets are also being used). In addition, so we can evaluate the scheme, a questionnaire was produced to obtain feedback to see what was working and how we could further improve our initiative. The success of the trial will largely be measured against questionnaire feedback.

Once evaluated, we will, if indications are good, look to widen the coverage to all universities and colleges throughout our networks where similar accommodation arrangements exist. For the trial and extension of this initiative going forward, we have acquired a further 5,000 CO alarms.

Benefits
Student awareness of CO dangers and safety will be raised by actually providing the physical alarms rather than simply suggesting their use. Awareness campaigns are beneficial but as is often said; 'you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink'. This initiative will not just raise awareness but may even save a life.

be **carbon monoxide** aware

CO Alarms – Enhanced Screening of Calls to the National Gas Emergency Number

SGN has led on a joint initiative aimed at enhancing the screening of calls regarding carbon monoxide made to the National Gas Emergency Number. This investigative work has been undertaken by GL (formerly Advantica) on a collaborative basis with all the gas network companies. Experience shows that a high percentage of jobs from reports mentioning carbon monoxide arise when customers experience low battery alarms.

The report proposes that enhanced questions could be devised leading to improved screening which in turn means better advice for the customer. One of the main reasons the questions are still to be finalised is that CO alarms in low battery alarm mode exhibit a range of similar, but not identical, alarms. If all alarms behaved identically in low battery alarm condition, questions would be much simpler to develop.