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BSS asks: “Boaters, are you wise to carbon monoxide poisoning?” this follows the discovery of two bodies on a private boat on the Norfolk Broads.

Boat Safety Scheme manager, Graham Watts, is asking boaters to be ‘carbon monoxide wise’, following confirmation at the initial inquest hearing that the poison gas caused the deaths of two boaters on a private boat on Wroxham Broad, Norfolk.

A man, woman and dog were found dead on a motor cruiser when investigations were prompted by the lack of activity on the boat for some time.

While the source of the carbon monoxide is to be confirmed, the BSS is reissuing its general CO safety advice for all boaters with the aim that, before someone steps aboard, they know how to recognise the risks of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and how to protect themselves from the ‘silent killer’.

Carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless gas, hence the silent killer tag, and can kill quickly if inhaled in high concentrations.

At lower levels of CO as it begins to take affect, the symptoms of poisoning are similar to flu or food poisoning, and include headaches, nausea and dizziness.

As time passes and, or the amount of CO builds, victims may suffer chest pains and breathlessness leading to seizure, unconscious. And if nothing is done, death can happen quickly after that.

So the early recognition of the symptoms is critical and action to get out to fresh air straight away can save lives.

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This deadly poison gas has multiple potential sources on boats including all fuel-burning appliances, flues, chimneys, engine exhausts and charcoal BBQs. In particular, the Boat Safety Scheme warns that CO build-up in the confined space of boat cabins can occur with one or a mix of these factors:

- with faulty, badly maintained or misused appliances
- exhaust fumes from a boat's engine or generator-
- escaped flue gases from solid fuel stoves
- blocked ventilation or short supply of air-fuels need the right amount of oxygen to burn safely

Boat Safety Scheme Advice on avoiding a carbon monoxide incident is to:

- Know the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning and how to react if it is suspected
- Fuel burning appliances should be installed properly by suitably qualified people
- Maintain appliances and engines routinely, competently and without bodes
- Use equipment correctly. Never use cookers for space heating
- Air is vital for fuel-burning appliances – never block ventilation, allow a sufficient supply
- Don't bring charcoal BBQs on board during or after use - *only stone-cold charcoal is safe*
- Keep engine fumes out of the cabin, never use a portable generator on the boat
- Know the danger signs, spot potential hazards early
- Deal with problems immediately, never use equipment you suspect has problems
- Install a certified CO alarm (BS EN 50291-2), test it routinely and never remove the batteries

Graham Watts of the Boat Safety Scheme added:

'Over a million people go boating free from harm each year, but to go boating safely, the risks need treating with due respect. Carbon monoxide in a small space like a boat cabin has to be avoided.

'By following the basic advice on our website and by having CO alarms on board as a back-up, you should have a happy and incident-free time afloat.'

More information is available at www.boatsafetyscheme.org/co

- ENDS -

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 harming visitors to the inland waterways, the waterways' workforce and any other users.