

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig

Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Ymchwiliad i Dlodi Tanwydd | Inquiry into Fuel Poverty

FP 16

Ymateb gan : Policy Connect

Evidence from : Policy Connect

It is essential that the Welsh Government's next fuel poverty strategy tackles carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and its impact on fuel-poor households.

CO is an odourless, tasteless and poisonous gas that is estimated to cause 30 deaths and 4,000 A&E attendances every year across the UK, at an annual cost of £178 million to taxpayers.¹ However, these figures are widely suspected to be underestimates due to the difficulty of diagnosing CO poisoning and the lack of reporting.² Our research shows that certain groups are particularly susceptible to the effects of CO poisoning, including: the elderly; pregnant people and foetuses; young children; and people with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions.³

Many of these same groups also face a higher risk of being exposed to CO. According to National Energy Action (NEA), living in fuel poverty is positively correlated with an increased risk of CO exposure.⁴ This occurs because fuel-poor households often cannot afford to repair (or regularly service) gas appliances and may be forced to rely on cheaper (but riskier) secondary heating systems.⁵ NEA's research also shows that 82.1% of fuel-poor households contain a child, an elderly person, or someone with a disability or long-term illness,⁶ groups which are more susceptible to CO exposure's effects.

The interplay between CO and fuel poverty therefore exacerbates the vulnerability of these groups, as they are both more likely to be poisoned by CO and will be affected more severely when they are.

By reducing fuel poverty, the Welsh Government would lower the risk of CO poisoning and in turn decrease its harmful impact on both the public's health

and government finances. To achieve this, the next fuel poverty strategy should:

1. Explicitly acknowledge the relationship between CO and fuel poverty in order to raise public awareness and better coordinate fuel poverty and public health campaigns;
2. Include a commitment to lowering the risk and impact of CO poisoning; and
3. Prioritise fuel-poor households with categories of residents who are particularly susceptible to CO poisoning, as this will maximise the health improvements caused by fuel-poverty schemes.

¹ Policy Connect. (2017). *Carbon monoxide poisoning: Saving lives, advancing treatment*. [Online]. Research. Available at:

<https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/appcog/research/carbon-monoxide-poisoning-saving-lives-advancing-treatment> [Accessed 15 October 2019]., p. 5.

² Ibid., p. 15.

³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴ National Energy Action. (2017). *Understanding carbon monoxide risk in households vulnerable to fuel poverty*. [Online]. Available at: http://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NEAGST-Report-2017_FINAL-1.pdf [Accessed 15 October 2019]., p. 6.

⁵ National Energy Action. (2017). *Understanding carbon monoxide risk in households vulnerable to fuel poverty*., pp. 6-7.

⁶ National Energy Action. (2018). *Fuel poverty statistics*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nea.org.uk/about-nea/fuel-poverty-statistics/> [Accessed 15 October 2019].