



As temperatures fall and we spend more time indoors, winter is the season when we turn on the heating and try to keep well and warm. You can find advice and information on our website to help you save money, keep your home warm and stay well. Visit www.homesplus.co.uk for a round-up of support that is available.

This can also be a time of increased risk at home, with more demands on gas and electrical appliances. **Our advisors and engineers have put together some tips to help you stay safe this winter.**

Making sure your home is gas-safe

As your landlord, we have a legal duty to carry out an annual gas safety inspection in your home.

We also make sure that appliances are working efficiently. At a time of soaring energy costs, that is even more important because it can help to reduce fuel bills.

All our homes are being fitted with life-saving carbon monoxide alarms this year (see page four for more information about what this means for you) and we are using new technology to protect our customers from the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Our contractor, Phoenix Gas Services attaches a barcode gas safety 'tag' to the gas meter in all our properties with a gas supply. This smart tag records information about any boiler and gas appliances.

An engineer visiting a home for a safety check, service or repair, will touch their mobile device against the tag. This automatically checks their certification and gives you the reassurance that only Gas Safe Registered engineers are carrying out this crucial work.

We all share the responsibility to keep homes and families safe. We are doing all that we can. You can help too by giving us access when we need to carry out essential work and by following the winter safety advice that we are providing.

Homes Plus prioritises gas safety all year. In winter, we are asking all our customers to take three steps to keep homes, families and neighbours gas-safe.

Step 1

Help us to keep you safe. It's a condition of your tenancy that you give us access to your home to carry out essential safety checks and install new safety measures, where necessary. When we need access to your home to carry out a safety inspection, we will contact you and let you know when we, or one of our contractors, will visit your home to complete the work.

If you need to reschedule an appointment, please contact our customer services team on **0800 048 8955** as soon as possible.

Each year we spend more than £64,500 on missed pre-booked appointments, reducing the budget that we have for home improvements, including work to boost energy efficiency.

Step 2

Look out for warning signs that your gas appliances aren't working correctly

- lazy yellow or orange flames instead of crisp blue ones, black marks on or around the appliance and too much condensation in the room.

Step 3

Know the six symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning – headaches, dizziness, breathlessness, nausea, collapse and loss of consciousness.

Meter tampering doesn't save money, it costs lives

Every year, around 280 people die as a result of meter tampering. That can mean attempting to interfere with the gas or electricity meter so that it doesn't record how much power is used, or even trying to bypass the meter. This is theft and can lead to a fine or prison sentence.

Electricity is dangerous. Tampering with wiring could make switches and appliances 'live'. It risks shocks and burns to anyone using them and can cause fires, putting other people in danger.

Interference with the gas supply can cause a leak. It can prevent appliances from working properly and lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Leaking gas can also be ignited extremely easily - all you

need to do is flick a switch to ignite the build-up. Leaks caused by tampering and interference put lives at risk.

If you are concerned that a meter may have been tampered with, speak up to save lives.

- Call our customer services team on **0800 048 8955**.
- Report meter tampering to Stay Energy Safe at www.stayenergysafe.co.uk/report-energy-crime or by calling **0800 023 2777**.
- Call the National Gas Emergency Line: **0800 111 999**
- Contact the UK Revenue Protection Association: **020 7090 1070** or go online at www.ukrpa.co.uk/report-energy-fraud
- Provide information to CrimeStoppers at www.crimestoppers-uk.org



The dangers of opening-up fireplaces to fit a coal fire or stove

As rising fuel costs pile the pressure on household budgets, people are increasingly looking for alternatives to central heating.

Many houses have had fireplaces blocked, gas fires removed or chimneys decommissioned. We understand that installing a wood burner or solid fuel (coal) fire can seem an attractive way to reduce energy costs.

Chimneys and fireplaces have been put out of use because they may

have defects or operational issues that make them unsafe to you and a danger to your neighbours. Using them can risk fume leakages, chimney or house fires and structural issues.

The safety of our customers is always our priority. For that reason Homes Plus never gives permission for new solid fuel fires or wood burning appliances. Unfortunately, where we do find these installations, we will arrange for their removal.



The chilling cost of using gas cookers to keep warm

For many of us, gas cookers are part of everyday life. During the surge in energy prices though, some people have put them to a new and potentially dangerous use.

Gas cookers generate a lot of heat and can quickly warm a kitchen when you are cooking. This has led to people using them as a heater to keep one room warm in an attempt to save money by not using central heating.

Using a cooker in this way can be very dangerous.

Unlike a gas fire, your cooker doesn't have a flue to safely remove fumes. When cookers are used to heat a room, windows and doors tend to remain closed. Along with the danger of burns and an increased risk of fire, this turns a kitchen into a sealed box, leading to potential carbon monoxide poisoning.

There are thousands of cases of carbon monoxide poisoning every year. Carbon monoxide is a highly poisonous gas. You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but it can kill quickly and without warning.

Ovens are designed to cook our food, not heat our homes. Please don't put yourself at risk this winter and remember to check on neighbours when the temperature drops.

Cooker manufacturers often release product safety alerts, reports and recalls for unsafe products and encourage customers to visit www.gov.uk/guidance/product-recalls-and-alerts for more info.

Say no to portable gas heaters

Portable Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) heaters connect to a gas bottle using a hose.

This kind of heater does not have a flue, meaning that fumes are released straight into the room.

If these units are not in good working order, are poorly maintained, or in a space which is not adequately ventilated, this can very quickly lead to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide, with the potential for serious injury or death.

The storage of the gas bottles themselves is also a risk. LPG in its various forms is highly flammable and explosive. A bottle connected to a flame source only increases this risk.

Portable LPG heaters and bottles are not permitted in our properties. This is to keep you, your loved ones and your neighbours safe.



Carbon monoxide alarms



Carbon monoxide is a dangerous gas. You can't see or smell it, but an alarm can detect it. To help keep you safe, Homes Plus is installing free carbon monoxide alarms in all our homes with qualifying appliances.

If your home is eligible, we will be visiting you soon, to fit these life-saving alarms.

Our Property Plus operative will identify any appliances you have which require an alarm. This will determine how many carbon monoxide alarms you need in your home and where they will be fitted. Drilling a small hole is all that is required to install the alarm. The visit should take less than 30 minutes and will cause minimal disruption.

We are fitting free carbon monoxide alarms in all qualifying homes and as we are sure you will understand, due to the very high number of properties involved, we are unable to make appointments. If our Property Plus team calls at your property and you are not in, they will leave a card to let you know that we visited. Please telephone the number on the card to arrange this essential work.

Remember: this is a free installation service, carried out by Property Plus, our award-winning in-house team providing repairs and maintenance exclusively for our properties. Uniformed operatives will arrive in one of our vehicles and will show you their identification. Keep your home safe from doorstep scammers. Always ask to see photo ID when someone you don't know, calls at your home.

In the dark winter months candles can make our homes feel cosy. We use them to celebrate special occasions and create an attractive glow. Remember, though, that candles bring a flame into your home. House fires caused by candles, kill and injure.

If you are using candles, make sure they stand on a heat-resistant surface and place them in a stable holder that keeps the candle upright. Never put candles near curtains or other fabrics and keep them well away from draughts.

It is easy to forget how much heat is created by a burning candle. That is why you should never place a candle below a shelf or other flammable surface. Keep your candle out of the reach of children and pets and don't leave candles burning when you leave a room or go to sleep. Use a snuffer or even a spoon to put out your candle – it is safer than blowing hot wax and sparks. Finally, make sure they're properly extinguished. Smouldering candles can start a fire. Have one last check that they are completely extinguished.

