

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESTAURANTS

OFFERING SHISHA PIPE SMOKING TO PREVENT CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING



Throughout the past, life-threatening incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning have occurred at some shisha bars in Hamburg and other German cities. Guests suffering from poisoning required urgent treatment, often involving oxygen therapy in a pressure chamber. Shishas (aka hookahs) are water pipes which use smouldering coals that can pose a significant health hazard for guests and staff due to the dangerous carbon monoxide emitted when preparing and smoking shishas. It is irrelevant whether tobacco, herbs, fruits or stones are smoked.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CARBON MONOXIDE?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is created in unclean (incomplete) combustion, which in this case is the burning of the water pipe coal. CO diffuses rapidly in the air and is easily absorbed in the lungs. It binds to red blood cells in the body much more effectively than oxygen and displaces it. This results in oxygen insufficiency, which first affects the central nervous system and can later affect the heart muscle as well. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and nausea, possibly followed by unconsciousness and death. Poisoning can have after-effects (especially for the nervous system and heart). Unborn babies, persons with heart problems and anaemia and the elderly are particularly at risk to carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide is colourless, odourless and tasteless, and does not irritate the respiratory system. It goes unnoticed for a long time, which is what makes it so dangerous. The body exhibits no defence responses (such as tearing eye, nausea, panic) against this poisonous gas.

OPERATORS MUST PRO-ACTIVELY TAKE PRECAUTIONS

To avoid the health hazards posed by carbon monoxide, including potential fatalities, the Public Health and Consumer Protection Authority has issued these recommendations:

- Ensure adequate air flow by having a ventilation system installed. Windows alone are insufficient for ventilation!
- Install quality carbon monoxide warning devices (CO detectors) in sufficient quantity.
- Post signage alerting guests to the special risks posed by carbon monoxide:

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"Dear guests,

please be advised that shisha water pipes are smoked in this establishment. Preparing and smoking the pipes releases carbon monoxide. Prolonged and/or intensive smoking of shishas without adequate active mechanical ventilation of the premises can create a potentially fatal health hazard. Pregnant women and heart disease patients are advised not to stay on the premises. Entrance is exclusively permitted to persons age 18 and above."

- Install an exhaust system for smoke and gas in the room used for preparing the coals and shisha/hookah pipes
- Incinerate accumulating smouldering coals in appropriate special containers and dispose of them properly

Precautionary advisory is given that further legal regulations apply respecting non-smoker protection, protection of minors, food law, emissions control, occupational safety, building law and preventive fire protection in addition to the aforementioned requirements for operating a shisha water pipe establishment.

Professional specialist firms should be contracted for installing and maintaining the ventilation system, exhaust system and CO detectors.

Establishment operators must be aware that they are responsible for ensuring that their establishment does not pose a health hazard for guests or staff. Civil damage claims may be brought if persons in the establishment are harmed by carbon monoxide, and criminal prosecution may result, such as for bodily injury. Violations are punishable by fine and imprisonment.

Herausgeber:

Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg

Behörde für Gesundheit und Verbraucherschutz (BGV)

Amt für Gesundheit, Fachabteilung Öffentlicher Gesundheitsdienst,
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