

CARBON MONOXIDE

INTRODUCTION

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a clear, colorless and tasteless gas. It can be toxic or even lethal at high concentrations.

Among other sources, CO is produced when organic compounds such as fuels and ordinary combustible materials are burned, especially when oxygen is limited.

HAZARDS

Carbon monoxide has been dubbed “the silent killer” because it is virtually undetectable without using technology specifically designed to detect it.

CO enters the body through inhalation. CO poisoning can be confused with flu symptoms, food poisoning and other illnesses. Some symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light headedness or headaches. High levels of CO can be fatal, causing death within minutes.

CO DETECTORS

CO detectors are the best way to ensure levels of carbon monoxide do not exceed safe limits. Building and fire codes now require CO detectors in residential occupancies where a buildup of CO is likely such as homes with attached garages, fireplaces or gas appliances.



CO detectors are readily available at hardware stores and online retailers for around \$30.

SAFETY TIPS

- CO alarms should be installed in a central location outside each sleeping area, on every level of the building and in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes or standards. Ideally, all CO alarms throughout the building are interconnected so that they all sound when one (or more) detects CO.
- Because carbon monoxide has properties similar to air, CO detectors are not required to be ceiling mounted and some are designed to be plugged into a standard electrical outlet.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for placement and mounting height.
- Combination detectors which detect both smoke and carbon monoxide are also available.
- Choose a CO alarm that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Test CO alarms at least once a month; replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- If the audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries. If the battery is low, replace it. If it still sounds, call the fire department.
- If the CO alarm sounds, immediately move to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door. Make sure everyone inside the home is accounted for. Call for help from a fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel.
- If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting it. Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if garage doors are open. Make sure the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle is not covered with snow.
- During and after a snowstorm, make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow build-up.
- A generator should be used in a well-ventilated location outdoors away from windows, doors and vent openings.
- Gas or charcoal grills can produce CO and should only be used outside.

For questions about Carbon Monoxide, contact EH&S at 206.543.7262.