



The Office of Fire Safety and Injury Prevention Education

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Carbon Monoxide Odorless, Colorless, Tasteless, and Deadly

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO), is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas formed from incomplete burning of flammable fuels.

Sources of Carbon Monoxide

CO is present whenever fuel is burned. Any appliance that uses wood, propane, gas, kerosene, natural gas, oil is a source of carbon monoxide. Mal-functioning appliances, cracked or blocked piping, and changes in pressure all can cause CO to build up in your home.

Effects of Carbon Monoxide

The poisonous gas, CO, enters the lungs when you breath. Unfortunately, the blood component that carries oxygen, called hemoglobin, absorbs CO better than oxygen. So eventually the heart and the brain become starved of oxygen. As the level of CO rises, the exposed person risks breathing difficulty, cardiac dysfunction, brain damage, coma, and eventually death.

Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning:

- Nausea/ Fatigue
- Headache/ Dizziness
- Irritability/ Confusion
- Difficulty Breathing

(Symptoms of CO poisoning are often confused with flu)

Watch for more than one family member experiencing similar symptoms at the same time and when they seem to improve when exposed to fresh air.

- Babies, children, pregnant woman, senior citizens, and people with heart or lung problems are most susceptible to CO poisoning.



What To Do:

- Purchase and install carbon monoxide detectors outside sleeping areas and near flammable fuel burning appliances, per the manufacturers instructions. Once installed, they need to be tested regularly (once a week for battery operated, once month for electric).
- Have all flammable fuel appliances serviced by a technician annually.
- If your CO detector goes off, take no chances. Leave your home immediately and dial **9-1-1** from a neighbors home. **DO NOT** go back into your home.

Purchasing Tips:

- Look for a detector with the UL (Underwriters Laboratory) seal.
- Make sure the detector has a battery backup so it will operate when the power is off.
- Read the manufacturers manual and installation instructions. Follow their directions and keep the owners manual for future reference.

Things To Remember:

- When operating a furnace and a fireplace at the same time, it is recommended you open a window slightly to help equalize the pressure allowing the combustion gases to flow freely out the chimney.
- A situation exists, more so in newer airtight homes, called **"Downdrafting."** This develops when exhaust fans are on, such as in the bathroom or kitchen, can cause the air pressure in the house to be lower than the pressure outside. When this occurs, flue gases, that would normally go up the flue and out, are sucked back down the carbon monoxide into your home.
- A similar situation occurs when you have two heating appliances (i.e. water heater and furnace) in the same utility closet that is unvented or inadequately vented. However, this is called **reverse stacking**. This happens when the one appliance turns on and is unable to get adequate air. It then pulls the CO exhaust and contaminates the house. If the furnace is the appliance reverse stacking then CO will quickly spread throughout the house.

**WHEN IN DOUBT...
DIAL 911**

Fact Sheet