

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

The Dangers of Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in America. Burning any fuel produces carbon monoxide. According to the American Medical Association (AMA), nearly 1,500 people die annually due to accidental carbon monoxide exposure, and an additional 10,000 seek medical attention. The purpose of this information is to answer frequently asked questions about carbon monoxide and to help you prevent accidental carbon monoxide poisoning.

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a flammable, colorless, odorless, tasteless toxic gas produced during incomplete combustion of fuel. Improperly operating appliances can produce fatal CO concentrations in homes. High levels of CO intake replace the oxygen in our blood and can cause unconsciousness and death.

How Does CO Enter The Home?

Carbon monoxide can escape from any fuel-burning appliance, furnace, water heater, fireplace, wood stove or space heater. Carbon monoxide can spill from vent connections in poorly maintained or blocked chimneys. A nest or other materials can block the flue and CO will spill back into the house. Improperly sized flues connected to new high-efficiency furnaces and water heaters can also contribute to CO spillage.

What Are The Symptoms Of CO Poisoning?

The initial symptoms of CO are similar to the flu. They include:

- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea
- Irregular Breathing

The danger of CO poisoning is that the gas is odorless, colorless, and tasteless and therefore often goes undetected. If you have any of these symptoms and you feel better when you are outside of your home you may have CO poisoning.

What To Do If Experiencing CO Poisoning Symptoms?

If you think you are experiencing any of the symptoms of CO poisoning, get fresh air immediately. Open windows and doors for ventilation, turn off any combustion appliances, and leave the home. Call the Fire Department immediately and contact medical services. Prompt medical attention is important if you are experiencing any symptoms of CO poisoning.

What Are Some Signs Of CO Poisoning In My Home?

There are several clues that are visible and several that you can not see. These include:

- Rusting or water streaking on vent/chimney
- Loose or missing furnace panel
- Sooting
- Loose or disconnected chimney connections
- Debris or soot falling from chimney
- Moisture inside of windows
- Internal appliance damage

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- Hidden blockage or damage in chimneys
- Decreasing hot water supply
- Furnace unable to heat house
- Soot on appliances
- Unfamiliar or burning odor

Prevention Measures

There are several measures that can prevent and/or detect CO poisoning. You should make sure appliances are installed according to manufacturer's instructions and local building codes. Most appliances should be installed by professionals and inspected and serviced annually. Chimneys and flues should be checked for blockages, corrosion, partial and complete disconnections, and loose connections. The installation of a carbon monoxide detector can provide added protection and should be used in addition to prevention measures.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that consumers purchase and install carbon monoxide detectors. Properly working detectors can provide an early warning to consumers before the deadly gas builds up to a dangerous level. Exposure to a low concentration over several hours can be as dangerous as exposure to high carbon monoxide levels for a few minutes. Carbon Monoxide detectors will detect both conditions. Detectors range from \$30-\$100 and can be purchased at your local hardware and/or discount stores.

Each home should have at least one carbon monoxide detector in the area outside individual bedrooms. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission believes that carbon monoxide detectors are as important to home safety as smoke detectors.

Renters are encouraged to request property owners or managers to install carbon monoxide detectors in rental units. The detectors should meet all requirements of the UL standard 2034 or the requirements of the IAS 6-96 standard.

You should periodically inspect carbon monoxide detectors to ensure proper working conditions. Consumers should follow the manufacturer's instructions. Please contact the Fire Department with questions regarding the purchasing of an appropriate detector.

Never ignore an alarming CO detector. Check for obvious causes first (i.e. battery, oven, candle nearby, etc.) Contact emergency services by calling 911 and immediately move to fresh air.

Other Prevention Tips

- Never burn charcoal inside a home, garage, vehicle, or tent.
- Never use portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside a home, garage, vehicle, or tent.
- Never leave a car running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- Never service fuel-burning appliances without proper knowledge, skills, and tools.
- Never use gas appliances for heating your home.
- Do not use gasoline-powered tools and engines indoors.
- Click below for a printable flyer on "Keeping Your Family Safe. Everyday."

The information contained in the brochure was obtained from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. More information can be obtained on the US CPSC web site, www.cpsc.gov or by calling the CPSC hotline at 1-800-638-2772.