

Carbon Monoxide Safety

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an acutely toxic gas made more hazardous because it is colorless, odorless and tasteless. There are no warning properties, and unanticipated overexposure to this highly dangerous gas readily occurs. According to the U.S. Products Safety Commission, this poisonous gas kills nearly three hundred people in their homes each year.

Carbon monoxide is produced by fuel-burning appliances and equipment in our homes. If you have heating, cooking or power equipment that uses fuel such as oil, natural gas, coal, wood, propane, gasoline, etc., then your house is at risk for potential carbon monoxide poisoning. Homes with attached garages are also at risk because vehicles left running in the garage can cause carbon monoxide to seep into the house.

Carbon monoxide is a chemical asphyxiant that exerts its effects by combining preferentially with hemoglobin, the oxygen-transport pigment in the blood, thereby excluding oxygen. Toxic effects are evident within minutes.

Symptoms of exposure to CO at 500 to 1000 parts per million (ppm) include headache, palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, weakness, confusion and nausea. Be careful-early symptoms of CO poisoning can be similar to those of the flu. Loss of consciousness and death may result from exposure to concentrations of 4000 ppm and higher. High concentrations may be rapidly fatal without producing significant warning symptoms.

Exposure to this gas may aggravate heart and artery disease and may cause chest pains in individuals with preexisting heart disease. Pregnant women are more susceptible to the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

In the event of a release of carbon monoxide, evacuate the area immediately. Remove exposed individuals to an uncontaminated area and seek immediate emergency help-usually by your local fire department or 9-1-1. Keep victims warm, quiet and at rest, and provide assisted expiration if breathing has stopped.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented by proper care and use of household equipment. Smoke alarms and CO alarms have different functions.

You Need Both CO Alarms and Smoke Alarms

Combination CO and smoke alarms are available.

Reference cited:

Home Safety Council, Safety Guide: Carbon Monoxide, April 25, 2005

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