

Carbon Monoxide Information Sheet



1. What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is a gas produced by incomplete combustion.

Anytime fuel burns, whether in a wood stove, automobile, furnace, water heater, outdoor grill or campfire, CO is produced. The amount of CO (Carbon Monoxide is deadly).

2. Why is it harmful?

It's harmful because it displaces the oxygen in your blood.

You can't see it or smell it.

Is referred to as the silent killer.

When you inhale CO, the molecules attach to your red blood cells more easily than oxygen molecules.

Your blood carries the CO molecules to your cells that are expecting new oxygen.

When that oxygen doesn't arrive, the cells start dying. When enough cells die, the body shuts down.

3. What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

CO poisoning feels like the flu or food poisoning.

You'll feel dizzy, restless, have mental confusion, severe headaches, fatigue and fainting.

Your skin also may turn bright red.

Eventually, CO poisoning can cause death.

4. How much CO is too much?

Any CO is too much, partially because it remains in your system.

Small amounts of CO over a long period are just as deadly as large amounts in a short period.

Firefighters test the air and look for anything over 35 ppm as harmful. This is the maximum allowable concentration for continuous exposure in an 8 hour period.

5. Why are there so many CO incidents in the news recently?

CO Poisonings spike in the winter because we use our furnaces, water heaters and space heaters much more during the cold months.

We also are tempted to start our cars in the garage before braving the cold weather outside.

6. How do we protect our families against this deadly gas?

Installing CO Alarms is the best defense against carbon monoxide poisonings.

Maintain appliances, use proper fuel and have your chimney cleaned annually by a licensed chimney sweep company.

Install and maintain a CO alarm on each floor of the house, especially near sleeping areas is the best solution.

Change batteries (if required) and maintain alarms by keeping them clean.

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7. Where should you place a carbon monoxide alarm?
 - Near bedrooms or sleeping areas is #1 priority.
 - On each level of the home.
 - Near any appliances that burn fuels
 - CO mixes with room air fairly evenly, so plug-in models near the floor are as good as models integrated into smoke alarms.

8. What are the different types of CO alarms?
 - Recommend a plug-in with battery backup that has a digital readout.
 - CO alarm only and combo CO/ smoke alarm.
 - Get a UL Listed alarm that meets the UL2034 safety standards (Consumer Product Safety Council recommended).
 - UL 2034 – how the alarm will respond and at what levels of CO
9. What should a family do if the CO Alarm activates?
 - Leave the house (or business or other building) immediately and call 911 from outside.
 - Grab the pets, too, if you can do so quickly. Calling 911 is especially important if you feel any symptoms of CO poisoning.
 - If feeling ill but alarm doesn't activate.....go to doctor, urgent care or ER.
10. What can a family expect when they call 911?
 - Firefighters and paramedics will assess you and your family for symptoms and treat or transport you if necessary.
 - They'll also wear protective equipment and explore the building to find the source of the CO.
 - They'll have tips on how to solve the problem and on how to avoid the problem in the future.
11. In addition to CO alarms, are there other technologies that can keep our families safe?
 - Other technologies include smoke alarms and residential sprinkler systems, but any safety technology is only useful if it is properly maintained.
12. Where can I get additional information about this topic?
 - CPSC.GOV
 - USFA.FEMA.GOV – U.S. Fire Administration
 - www.firesafetyeducators.org