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Department of Commerce

Division of State Fire Marshal

The Silent Killer in Your Home

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can kill you when inhaled. It does this by inhibiting the blood's ability to carry necessary oxygen to vital organs such as the heart and brain. It is colorless, odorless and tasteless, and can kill you without warning.

Carbon monoxide cannot be detected without a carbon monoxide detector/alarm. These detectors are available in plug-in, battery-operated, or hardwire models; and should show the "UL" marking (indicating it is listed by Underwriters Laboratories).

Sources of Carbon Monoxide

CO is a by-product of incomplete combustion. Any fuel-burning device may produce dangerous levels of CO gas. Examples include:

- Fuel fired furnaces (non-electric)
- Gas water heaters
- Generators
- Fireplaces and wood stoves
- Gas stoves
- Non-electric space heaters
- Gas dryers
- Charcoal grills
- Lawnmowers, snowblowers, etc.
- Automobiles

Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- All appliances should be professionally installed, maintained and used in strict accordance with manufacturer's recommendations.
- Have the heating system inspected/serviced yearly (in addition to any other gas, oil or coal burning appliance).
- Make sure chimneys and vents are checked for blockages, corrosion, and loose connections.
- Open flues completely when fireplaces are in use.
- Use proper fuel in kerosene space heaters.
- Never burn charcoal or use a barbecue grill inside a home or enclosed area.
- Never use portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside a home, garage, vehicle or tent.
- Never leave a car or mower running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- Never operate unvented fuel-burning appliances in any room where people are sleeping.
- Never use the kitchen stove or oven for heating the house.
- Never use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside the home or garage. When placed outside, make certain it is not close to a window or door.

Signs of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Don't be fooled, CO poisoning can present like other illnesses (headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion which can escalate to un-consciousness and death). If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, consult a health care professional.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Have alarms located on every level of your home, (or minimally at least one near the sleeping area). They may be installed at any level or on the ceiling. Ceiling mounts should be away from smoke detectors so you may easily identify which detector is alarming. Change your batteries twice yearly and follow all manufacturers' instructions to maintain your detectors in good working order. If your detector alarms and you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, contact your fire department. If there are no physical symptoms, turn off any gas burning appliances or equipment, ventilate the area, and attempt to reset the alarm. If the alarm will not reset, or it resounds, call a qualified technician to inspect your section.

The Detector Team:

YOU MUST HAVE BOTH

A CO detector does not replace a smoke detector. Smoke detectors sound before a CO detector can react, allowing for more time to escape.

Working smoke detectors save lives. Install smoke alarms on each level of your home and inside of all sleeping areas. Test your detectors monthly and change the batteries in them twice a year. Change Your Clock - Change Your Batteries.

Have a plan for escaping a fire and practice it by holding fire drills at least twice a year. Make sure there are two clear ways out of each room. Have everyone meet at a location outside of the home. Never go back into a burning house. Get Out and Stay Out!

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