

A HOME

Protect Your Family Against CO Poisoning This Winter

Each year, unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning claims more than 500 American lives and sends another 15,000 people to hospital emergency rooms for treatment, according to the United States Fire Administration. Here's what families need to know about protecting themselves from deadly carbon monoxide fumes.

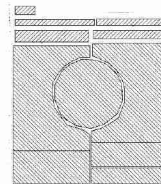
Q. What is carbon monoxide, and where does it come from?

It's no surprise carbon monoxide (CO) has been given the nickname "the silent killer." It's an odorless, invisible, highly toxic and deadly gas that is produced from the incomplete combustion of wood and fossil fuels like oil, natural gas, charcoal, kerosene and gasoline. Unfortunately, carbon monoxide has become a very real threat within homes across the country, since it can accumulate when everyday appliances — like water heaters, furnaces, ranges, ovens, clothes dryers and space heaters — don't work the way they're supposed to.

Malfunctioning appliances, however, aren't the only culprits for increased CO levels around the house. Poor ventilation also can cause the buildup of the poisonous gas if chimney flues or exhaust vents become blocked; grills, wood-burning stoves or fireplaces aren't properly vented; or a vehicle is left running inside the garage.

Q. Is there a "safe" level of carbon monoxide?

There's really no agreed-upon safe level of carbon monoxide exposure. Factors like age, body mass and pre-existing health conditions can affect a person's tolerance, and what amounts to mild or moderate CO risk for one person could equal a deadly dose for another. While carbon monoxide is dangerous to everyone, the people most at risk for CO poisoning are unborn babies, infants, children, senior citizens and those people with cardiac and respiratory disorders.



Q. What are the signs of CO poisoning?

Breathing in too much carbon monoxide prevents vital oxygen from entering your bloodstream. Depending on the level and length of exposure, carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms can vary. Mild exposure can lead to symptoms like fatigue, light headache, flu-like symptoms, nausea and vomiting. Medium-exposure symptoms can intensify to include elevated heart rate, severe throbbing headache, drowsiness and confusion or disorientation. The most severe symptoms, associated with the highest levels of carbon monoxide exposure, are unconsciousness, convulsions and failure of the heart and lungs, which ultimately can result in brain damage and death.

If you ever suspect you or someone you're with is suffering from CO poisoning, quickly move yourself or the other person outdoors or to a well-ventilated area, then call 911.

Q. How can I protect my family?

Install at least one carbon monoxide alarm with an audible warning signal near sleeping areas and outside individual bedrooms. Make sure the alarm has been evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Be sure each level of the house is equipped with at least one carbon monoxide detector. And every CO detector should be changed at regular five-year intervals to ensure your family is well-protected.

In addition, have a qualified professional check all fuel-burning appliances, furnaces, venting and chimney systems at least once a year. Also, never use your range or oven to help heat your home, and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or garage. In the winter, do not start your car to warm it up inside the garage or keep it running in a garage. Even if the garage doors are open, normal circulation will not provide enough fresh air to reliably prevent a dangerous buildup of CO.

Q. How do carbon monoxide detectors work?

Carbon monoxide detectors sense what the eyes and nose can't. Because CO is undetectable, people generally are never aware of its presence until it's too late, and carbon monoxide poisoning already has taken hold in the body. In many tragic cases, people have been asleep during the onset of symptoms and died without ever having known they were in danger. By detecting the presence of CO in a living space and sounding an alarm that's loud enough to wake even the soundest sleeper, carbon monoxide detectors provide the chance to escape safely.

Q. What should I do if my carbon monoxide alarm goes off?

Immediately evacuate all members of your household outdoors into fresh air, then dial emergency services. Because they're able to safely enter homes wearing protective gas masks, members of the local fire department typically respond to CO-related emergencies. They use highly sensitive, handheld CO detection units to obtain an accurate reading of the carbon monoxide levels in the home.

Information provided by Paul Holstein, co-founder and COO of CableOrganizer.com, a provider of cable, wire and equipment management solutions. The online retailer now offers the new Kidde® Battery Operated Carbon Monoxide/Smoke Combo Alarm (\$51.64), which gives a verbal alert, such as "Fire," "Carbon Monoxide" and "Low battery" to thwart user confusion.

