

# Carbon Monoxide, the Silent Killer

## Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause serious illness and death. Any device that burns fuel produces carbon monoxide, or CO. The effects of CO exposure vary from person to person depending on the concentration and length of exposure. At lower levels, CO exposure symptoms include headaches, dizziness, and nausea. At moderate concentrations, angina, impaired vision, and reduced brain function may result. At higher levels of exposure, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home because it's impossible to see, smell or taste the toxic fumes. Acute effects are due to the formation of carboxyhemoglobin in the blood (a compound formed when inhaled carbon monoxide binds to hemoglobin), which then inhibits oxygen intake.

## Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips

- Install a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector if your home's appliances, furnace or fireplace burn a solid fuel, liquid or gas. Be sure to replace the battery when you change your clocks in the fall and spring.
- Have your heating system, water heater and any natural gas, oil or propane burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician once a year.
- Do not use a camp stove, hibachi or charcoal grill inside your house or garage or near a window.
- Never use a gas stove or gas range to heat your home.
- Never use a gas-powered generator inside your home or attached garage or near an open window.
- Do not run a car or truck inside a garage attached to a house, even if you leave the door open.
- Have fireplaces, chimneys and flues checked and cleaned by a qualified professional every year.

## If Your Carbon Monoxide Detector Goes Off

- If anyone inside is displaying symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, immediately evacuate everyone from the home.
- Call 9-1-1 and report to the dispatcher what happened and the number of people feeling ill.
- Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department official.
- If no one inside is feeling ill, silence the alarm.
- Turn off all appliances and sources of combustion.
- Open windows and doors to ventilate the house.
- Call a qualified professional to locate the source of carbon monoxide and repair it.

## Steps to Reduce Exposure to Carbon Monoxide

It is most important to be sure combustion equipment is maintained and properly adjusted. Vehicular use should be carefully managed adjacent to buildings and in vocational programs. Additional ventilation can be used as a temporary measure when high levels of CO are expected for short periods of time.

- Keep gas appliances properly adjusted.

- Consider purchasing a vented space heater when replacing an unvented one.
- Use proper fuel in kerosene space heaters.
- Install and use an exhaust fan vented to outdoors over gas stoves.
- Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
- Choose properly sized wood stoves that are certified to meet EPA emission standards. Make certain that doors on all wood stoves fit tightly.
- Have a trained professional inspect, clean, and tune-up central heating system (furnaces, flues, and chimneys) annually. Repair any leaks promptly.
- Do not idle the car inside garage.

Fact Sheet on Carbon Monoxide - [www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data\\_General\\_Facts/carbonmonoxide-factsheet.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/carbonmonoxide-factsheet.pdf)

Provided by the Bridgeport Charter Township Fire Department  
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