

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS POINTERS



CARBON MONOXIDE



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless poisonous gas that can cause serious illness or even death when inhaled over a period of time. Carbon monoxide is produced whenever a fuel (gasoline, wood, coal, propane, oil, or methane) is burned.

Why is CO dangerous?

The great danger of carbon monoxide is its attraction to hemoglobin in the blood stream. CO is breathed in through the lungs, and bonds with hemoglobin in your blood, displacing the oxygen that cells need to function. CO rapidly accumulates in the blood. It will eventually displace enough oxygen in your system to suffocate you from the inside, resulting in brain damage or death.

How does CO enter the home?

Carbon monoxide can escape from any *fuel-burning* appliance, furnace, water heater, fireplace, wood stove, charcoal grill, or space heater. Warming vehicles up in an attached garage, even with the garage door open, can allow concentrated amounts of CO to enter your home through the door, vents and windows close to the garage. A clogged chimney or improper venting is one of the leading causes of CO poisonings.

Who is at risk of CO poisoning?

Everyone is at risk. Carbon monoxide poisoning can happen to anyone. 1,500 people die annually due to accidental CO exposure, an additional 10,000 seek medical attention. Unborn babies, infants, senior citizens, and people with coronary or respiratory problems are at the greatest risk.

How do I know if I am suffering from CO poisoning?

Low levels of CO poisoning result in symptoms commonly mistaken for a cold or flu - fatigue, mild headaches, and nausea.

With higher levels, the symptoms become more severe - dizziness, mental confusion, severe headaches, nausea, fainting on mild exertion. As levels move higher with there may be unconsciousness and death.

How do I protect myself from CO poisoning?

The best defense against CO poisoning is safe use of vehicles and proper installation, use and maintenance of household cooking and heating equipment. CO detectors inside the home will provide early warning of accumulating carbon monoxide. However, a CO detector is no substitute for safe use and maintenance of all appliances and other equipment.

- ❖ If it's necessary to warm up a vehicle, remove it from the garage **immediately** after starting the ignition. Do not run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if the garage doors are open.
- ❖ Have your vehicle inspected for exhaust leaks if you exhibit any symptoms of CO poisoning.
- ❖ Have fuel-burning household heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, wood stoves, and space or portable heaters) checked every year - before cold weather sets in.
- ❖ All chimneys and chimney connectors should be evaluated for proper installation, cracks, blockages or leaks.
- ❖ Before installing heating equipment in a smaller room, check with your fuel supplier to ensure that air for proper combustion is provided.
- ❖ When camping, especially during the colder months, use battery-powered heaters and flashlights in tents, trailers and motor homes.
- ❖ When using a fireplace, make sure to open the flue for adequate ventilation.
- ❖ Always use barbecue grills, which produce carbon monoxide, outside. Never use them in the home or garage.