

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, tasteless and toxic gas produced as a by-product of combustion.

Why do I need a carbon monoxide detector?

Any fuel burning appliance, vehicle, tool or other device has the potential to produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide gas. Examples of carbon monoxide producing devices commonly in use around the home include:

- Fuel fired furnace (non electric)
- Gas water heaters
- Gas stoves
- Gas dryers
- Charcoal grills
- Lawnmowers and other yard equipment
- Automobiles
- Fireplaces and woodstoves

Have a certified inspector perform regular maintenance and inspection of gas burning equipment in the home to minimize the potential for exposure to CO gas.

What are the medical effects of carbon monoxide and how do I recognize them?

When CO is inhaled, it combines with the oxygen in your blood. A low concentration of CO causes fatigue in healthy people and chest pain in people with heart disease. Higher concentrations of CO causes impaired vision, impaired coordination, headaches, dizziness, confusion and nausea. It can cause unconsciousness. Exposure may cause flu-like symptoms (but without the fever) that clears up after leaving homes. Carbon monoxide can be fatal at very high concentrations.

What steps should I take to reduce exposure to carbon monoxide?

- Keep gas appliances properly adjusted
- Install and use an exhaust fan vented to outdoors over gas stoves
- Choose properly sized wood stoves that are certified to meet EPA emission standards
- Do not idle the car inside garage
- Check for malfunctioning furnace or water heater units
- Repair cracked furnace heat exchange
- Inspect chimney before each heating season for leakage and blockage
- Open flues when fireplaces are in use
- Make sure your appliances have adequate ventilation
- Do not place gas powered device near fresh air vents
- Use proper fuel in kerosene space heater

What should be done if my carbon monoxide detector sounds?

Do not panic. Operate the reset button. Immediately leave the area to get fresh air. Go to neighbor or use a cell phone to call your emergency services (fire department or 911).

What can I expect to happen if I call my emergency service?

Be prepared to provide the following information:

- Address
- Type of detector in use
- If anyone is feeling ill with 'flu-like' symptoms
- Number of occupancy
- Detector reading (if available)