

Carbon Monoxide Dangers and Prevention Issues

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Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that can cause illness and death. CO is found in combustion emissions, such as those produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, and gas ranges and heating systems. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, drowsiness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. Breathing in high levels of CO can cause loss of consciousness, possible brain damage, and death.

CO poisoning can be prevented by taking some simple precautions, including:

- Properly install, maintain, and operate all fuel-burning appliances.
- Annually inspect furnaces, water heaters, and gas dryers.
- Each year, check and clean fireplace chimneys and flues.
- Operate unvented fuel-burning space heaters only while someone is awake to monitor them and doors or windows in the room are open to provide fresh air.
- Annually inspect automobile exhaust systems.
- Never use a gas range or oven to heat a facility.
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent, or camper.
- Never run a generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine outside of an open window or door where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or semi-enclosed space.
- Install, test, and maintain carbon monoxide detection alarms, in accordance with NFPA 720, *Carbon Monoxide Detection and Warning Equipment*, published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Never ignore symptoms, particularly if more than one person is feeling them. Severe carbon monoxide poisoning can result in loss of consciousness, coma, and death. In most cases of unintentional CO poisonings, victims did not realize that carbon monoxide was being produced or building up in the air they were breathing. Carbon monoxide can be easily and inexpensively detected by using CO detectors.

If you experience symptoms that you think could be from CO poisoning:

- Leave the area and get fresh air immediately.

- Get immediate medical attention (e.g., call 911).
- Inform the physician you suspect CO poisoning. If CO poisoning has occurred, it can often be diagnosed by a blood test done soon after exposure.