

Maryland State Firemen's Association

Fire Prevention and Life Safety Committee

TIP Sheet: CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) & CO ALARMS



CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) & CO ALARMS

Each year in America, carbon monoxide poisoning claims approximately 480 lives and sends another 15,200 people to hospital emergency rooms for treatment.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

What is carbon monoxide? Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes; CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. At lower levels of exposure, CO causes mild effects that are often mistaken for the flu. These symptoms include headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea and fatigue. The effects of CO exposure can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and the concentration and length of exposure.

Where does carbon monoxide come from? CO gas can come from several sources: gas-fired appliances, charcoal grills, wood-burning furnaces or fireplaces and motor vehicles.

Who is at risk? Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning.

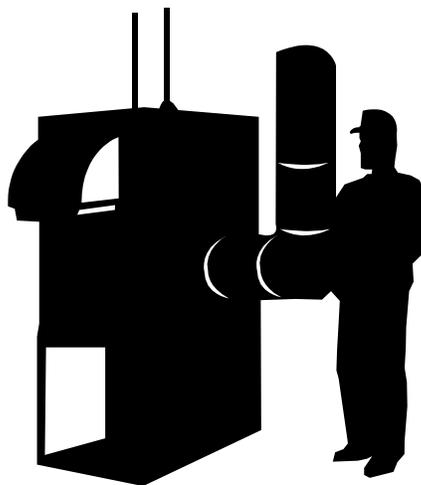
WHAT ACTIONS DO I TAKE IF MY CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM GOES OFF?

If the alarm sounds and no one is feeling ill: 1.) Silence the alarm. 2.) Turn off all appliances and sources of combustion (i.e. furnace and fireplace). 3.) Ventilate the house with fresh air by opening doors and windows. 4.) Call a qualified professional to investigate the source of the possible CO buildup.

If illness is a factor: 1.) Evacuate all occupants immediately. 2.) Determine how many occupants are ill and determine their symptoms. 3.) Call your local emergency number and when relaying information to the dispatcher, include the number of people feeling ill. 4.) Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department representative. 5.) Call a qualified professional to repair the source of the CO.

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Install at least one Underwriters Laboratories listed carbon monoxide alarm with an audible warning signal near the sleeping areas and outside individual bedrooms. For maximum protection, an alarm should be installed on every level of the home. Place at least 15 feet away from fuel burning appliances. Mount the CO Detector on the wall at least 12 inches from the ceiling and no lower than 5 feet from the floor. Make sure nothing is covering or obstructing the unit. Do not place in dead air spaces, or next to a window or a door.



Carbon monoxide alarms measure levels of CO over time and are designed to sound an alarm before an average, healthy adult would experience symptoms. It is very possible that you may not be experiencing symptoms when you hear the alarm. This does not mean that CO is not present. Have a qualified professional check all fuel burning appliances, furnaces, and venting and chimney systems at least once a year.

NEVER use your range or oven to help heat your home and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or garage.

NEVER keep a car 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.

How to check a CO Detector: Just like checking your smoke alarms we request that you check it monthly and change the batteries twice a year. Fall Back and Spring Forward.

The presence of a carbon monoxide alarm in your home can save your life in the event of CO buildup.