

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (chemical symbol CO) is a colorless, tasteless, odorless, toxic gas that is produced when fuel is burned. Wood, oil, gasoline, natural gas, kerosene, and coal all produce carbon monoxide when burned. When a person breathes carbon monoxide, it blocks the ability of blood to carry oxygen and can cause severe lung and brain damage or even death. Carbon monoxide is a leading cause of poisoning deaths, resulting in more than 1700 suicides and over 500 unintentional deaths every year in the United States.

The August 28, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article showing that carbon monoxide deaths declined after 1975, probably related to regulation of motor vehicle emissions, but continue to be a major public health problem.

SYMPTOMS OF CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Individuals may be exposed to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide because of a faulty furnace or in an unventilated garage where carbon monoxide can build up quickly when a car is running. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can occur immediately or more gradually after long-term exposure. Common symptoms include

- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Fainting

If you have these symptoms after being in an enclosed area, get fresh air immediately and go to an emergency department. Be sure to tell your doctor that you suspect you may have carbon monoxide poisoning.

PRECAUTIONS YOU SHOULD TAKE

- Buy a carbon monoxide detector for your home
- Never use your oven to heat your kitchen or home
- Never idle a car or let the engine run in a garage
- Never use gasoline-powered engines (mowers, weed trimmers, snowblowers, chain saws, small engines, or generators) in closed spaces
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove in an enclosed area or indoors, even in a fireplace, or in a tent
- Have your fuel-burning appliances, including oil and gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ranges and ovens, gas dryers, gas or kerosene space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves inspected annually
- Make sure that flues and chimneys are well connected and have an annual inspection and cleaning to be sure they are not blocked by debris, bird nests, or soot

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Consumer Product Safety Commission, US Environmental Protection Agency

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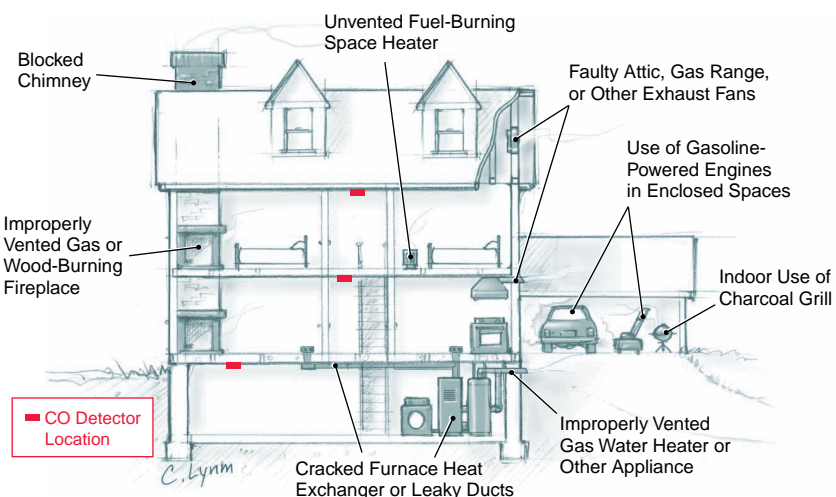
FOR MORE INFORMATION

- United States Environmental Protection Agency
800/438-4318
www.epa.gov
- Consumer Product Safety Commission
800/638-2772
www.cpsc.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
404/639-7584
www.cdc.gov/communication/tips/carbmnx.htm

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Possible Sources of Carbon Monoxide (CO) in a Home



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