

Carbon Monoxide Alarms FAQ

1. What is carbon monoxide (CO) and how is it produced?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a deadly, colorless, odorless, poisonous gas. It is produced by the incomplete burning of various fuels, including coal, wood, charcoal, oil, kerosene, propane, and natural gas. Products and equipment powered by internal combustion engines such as portable generators, cars, lawn mowers, and power washers also produce CO.

2. What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Because CO is odorless, colorless, and otherwise undetectable to the human senses, people may not know that they are being exposed. The initial symptoms of low to moderate CO poisoning are similar to the flu (but without the fever). They include:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Dizziness

High level CO poisoning results in progressively more severe symptoms, including:

- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Loss of muscular coordination
- Loss of consciousness
- Ultimately death

Symptom severity is related to both the CO level and the duration of exposure. For slowly developing residential CO problems, occupants and/or physicians can mistake mild to moderate CO poisoning symptoms for the flu, which sometimes results in tragic deaths. For rapidly developing, high level CO exposures (e.g., associated with use of generators in residential spaces), victims can rapidly become mentally confused, and can lose muscle control without having first experienced milder symptoms; they will likely die if not rescued.

3. What do I do if I think I have been exposed to carbon monoxide (CO)?

Play it Safe - If you experience symptoms that you think could be from CO poisoning:

- CALL 911 or your local emergency number.
- GET FRESH AIR IMMEDIATELY. Open doors and windows, turn off combustion appliances and leave the house.
- DO NOT re-enter the premises until cleared by emergency personnel.
- GO TO AN EMERGENCY ROOM and tell the physician you suspect CO poisoning. If CO poisoning has occurred, it can often be diagnosed by a blood test done soon after exposure.

4. Are carbon monoxide (CO) alarms required by law?

As of July 1, 2011, the Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act (Senate Bill – SB 183) will require all single-family homes with an attached garage or a fossil fuel source to install carbon monoxide alarms within the home by July 1, 2011. Owners of multi-family leased or rental dwellings, such as apartment buildings, have until January 1, 2013 to comply with the law.

5. How should I install a CO Alarm?

CO alarms should be installed according to the manufacturer's instructions.

6. Are CO alarms reliable?

CO alarms always have been and still are designed to alarm before potentially life-threatening levels of CO are reached. The safety standards for CO alarms have been continually improved and currently marketed CO alarms are not as susceptible to nuisance alarms as earlier models.

7. How should a consumer test a CO alarm to make sure it is working?

Consumers should follow the manufacturer's instructions. Using a test button tests whether the circuitry is operating correctly, not the accuracy of the sensor. Alarms have a recommended replacement age, which can be obtained from the product literature or from the manufacturer.

8. Do CO alarms operate differently than smoke alarms?

Although they may look and sound similar, CO alarms and smoke alarms are designed and intended to detect two distinct hazards. Therefore, to help protect your family from both hazards, it is important to install both UL Listed CO alarms and UL Listed smoke detectors.

9. How can I prevent CO poisoning from my home appliances?

- Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters (catalytic) indoors. Although these heaters don't have a flame, they burn gas and can cause CO to build up inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- If you smell an odor from your gas refrigerator's cooling unit have an expert service it. An odor from the cooling unit of your gas refrigerator can mean you have a defect in the cooling unit. It could also be giving off CO.
- When purchasing gas equipment, buy only equipment carrying the seal of a national testing agency, such as the American Gas Association or Underwriters' Laboratories.
- Install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.

For more information about carbon monoxide, please visit the San Marino Fire Department. Carbon monoxide alarm pamphlets from the NFPA are available at the front office. You may also visit the links provided below.

Links

Cal Fire

http://www.fire.ca.gov/communications/downloads/fact_sheets/CarbonMonoxide.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>

Los Angeles County

http://fire.lacounty.gov/top_story_images/faq_CO.pdf

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

<http://www.nfpa.org/asplash/brochures/carbonmonoxide.asp>

Underwriters Laboratory

<http://www.ul.com/global/eng/pages/offerings/perspectives/consumer/productsafety/co/>

US Consumer Product Safety Commission

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/466.html>

Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_monoxide_detector