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Frequently Asked Questions Carbon Monoxide

Q. What Is Carbon Monoxide?

A. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that interferes with the delivery of oxygen in the blood to the rest of the body and is highly poisonous.

Q. What Are the Major Sources of CO?

A. Carbon monoxide is produced as a result of incomplete burning of fuels including coal, wood, charcoal, natural gas, gasoline, diesel, kerosene, and heating oil. It can be produced by portable generators, small gasoline engines, charcoal grills, gas stoves, automobile exhaust from attached garages, and smoking tobacco. Problems can arise as a result of improper placement, installation, operation, maintenance of CO-generating devices or appliances. Improperly designed or malfunctioning exhaust systems for permanently installed home combustion appliances may also contribute to elevated CO levels. Portable generators and charcoal grills are major sources of CO and should never be operated inside enclosed or partially enclosed buildings or near doors, windows and openings to the house.

Q. What Are the Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning?

A. Depending on the level of exposure, CO may cause fatigue, weakness, chest pains for those with heart disease, shortness of breath upon exertion, nausea, vomiting, headaches, confusion, lack of coordination, impaired vision, loss of consciousness, and in severe cases, death.

Q. What Should You Do If You Think You Have CO Poisoning?

A. If you think you are suffering from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, you should get fresh air immediately. Turn off all combustion appliances and leave the house. Go to an emergency room. Be sure to tell the physician that you suspect CO poisoning. Don't ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them. In cases of severe CO poisoning, call 911 emergency services or the Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Q. What Can Be Done to Prevent CO Poisoning?

A. To prevent CO poisoning, ensure that all household combustion appliances (fireplaces, stoves, water heaters, furnaces) are properly adjusted and working to manufacturers' instructions and local building codes and make sure stoves and heaters are exhaust vented to the outside and that exhaust systems do not leak.

Do not use ovens and gas ranges to heat your home. Do not burn charcoal inside a home, cabin, recreational vehicle, or camper, and never leave a car or lawn mower engine running in a shed or garage, or in any enclosed or partially enclosed space. NEVER use gas-powered generators or pressure washers inside any building or structure. Ventilating a building or



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structure will not prevent the buildup of life threatening levels of CO. Do not locate portable generators or portable gasoline engines near any opening of the house (windows, doors, window air conditioners, exhaust vents).

Q. What About Carbon Monoxide Alarms?

A. Consider installing CO alarms in your home. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends the installation of CO alarms in every home. Install battery operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup according to manufacturer's installation instructions. The CO alarm should be certified to the requirements of the latest safety standards for CO alarms (UL 2034, IAS 6-96, CSA 6.19.01).

REMEMBER: Carbon monoxide (CO) alarms can be used as a backup but not as a replacement for proper use, placement and maintenance of your fuel-burning appliances or gas powered portable equipment. Also, understand that CO alarms are designed to sound an alert at fairly high levels. Lower level CO exposure below the alarm threshold could still contribute to adverse health effects in susceptible individuals (persons with heart or lung disease for example).

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