



Winter-time Safety: Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Each year, more than 500 people nationwide die as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning according to a recent report from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC reports that certain groups (i.e. unborn babies, infants, and individuals with respiratory and/or chronic heart problems) are more prone to the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning. However, carbon monoxide poisoning can be prevented with knowledge and properly installed alarm systems. As we move into the winter months more Virginia citizens will be turning on their heat and using alternative heating sources (i.e. kerosene and wood) that increase the risk for carbon monoxide poisoning. Due to rising gas and oil prices, this year may be especially hazardous. Therefore, in order to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning it is important to be aware of its causes and warning signs.

The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of carbon monoxide ingestion can cause loss of consciousness and death. Unless suspected, carbon monoxide poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms mimic other illnesses. People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from carbon monoxide poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.

Knowledge is the key to preventing carbon monoxide poisoning. In most cases of unintentional 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 cheaply detected in the home.

You can prevent carbon monoxide exposure by following these safety tips:

- **Do** have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- **Do** install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and test at least once a month, and replace CO alarms according to the manufacturer's instructions. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that a CO alarm should be centrally located outside of each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms. For added protection, install additional CO alarms in each separate bedroom, and on every level of your home.
- **Do** leave your home immediately and call 911 if the detector sounds.
Do seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseous.
- **Don't** use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window.
- **Don't** run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open.
- **Don't** burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't vented.
- **Don't** heat your house with a gas oven.

Visit the following Web sites for more information about carbon monoxide poisoning:

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/co

National Fire Protection Association: www.nfpa.org

US Consumer Product Safety Commission: www.cpsc.gov



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