

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE

To increase public awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning, a Carbon Monoxide Awareness Committee made up of fuels safety experts prepared the following guide to provide important safety information you need to keep you and your family safe.

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon Monoxide (also called CO) is a poisonous gas that you cannot see, smell or taste. It is often referred to as the “silent killer”. CO is produced by the incomplete burning of fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, kerosene, coal, charcoal or wood.

Improperly installed or poorly maintained appliances that run on these fuels may create unsafe levels of CO. In enclosed spaces such as your home, cottage or recreational vehicle, even a small amount of CO is dangerous.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness. In very severe cases, CO poisoning can cause brain damage and death. The elderly, children, people with heart or respiratory conditions, and pets may be particularly sensitive to CO and may feel the effects sooner.

What can create a CO hazard?

Conditions that can create a CO hazard include:

- Fuel-burning appliances, venting systems and chimneys that have not been serviced and maintained regularly by a qualified service technician or heating contractor.
- A chimney blocked by a bird or squirrel’s nest, snow and ice or other debris.
- Improper venting of a furnace and cracked furnace heat exchangers.
- Exhaust fumes seeping into your home from a car running in an attached garage.
- Using fuel-burning appliances designed for outdoor use (barbecues, lanterns, chainsaws, lawnmowers, snowblowers) in a closed area (tent, recreational vehicle, cottage, workshop, garage).
- Combustion gases spilling into a home if too much air is being consumed by a fireplace or exhausted by kitchen/bathroom fans in a tightly-sealed home.

Be aware of these Danger Signs!

- You or other members of your family are experiencing the symptoms of CO exposure.
- You notice a sharp, penetrating odour or smell of gas when your furnace or other fuel-burning appliance turns on.
- The air feels stale or stuffy.
- The pilot light of your gas furnace or other fuel-burning appliance goes out.
- Chalky, white powder forms on the chimney/exhaust vent pipe or soot builds up around the exhaust vent.
- Excessive moisture forms on windows and walls.
- The alarm of a carbon monoxide detector sounds.

What should I do if I suspect CO in my home?

At any time, if you or any one else in your home is experiencing the symptoms of CO, make sure that everyone leaves the home immediately and gets medical help. Call 911 or your local fire department.

If a CO detector alarm sounds in your home, open all doors and windows to ventilate. If you can't find the problem and the alarm continues, contact your local gas utility or a qualified heating contractor to check your fuel-burning equipment.

About Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Only carbon monoxide detectors bearing the new Canadian Standards Association CAN/CGA 6.19 standard or the Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) 2034 standard, are recommended by the Carbon Monoxide Awareness Committee. At least one CO detector should be installed at knee-height, adjacent to the sleeping area of your home. CO detectors should not be installed beside smoke detectors or near any fuel-burning appliances. Please refer to the manufacturer's instructions for further details regarding proper use and maintenance.

The use of CO detectors that meet these standards can warn you about sudden failures of fuel-burning appliances and are a good second line of defence against CO exposure in your home, cottage and recreational vehicle.

CO detectors are not a substitute for the care and maintenance of your fuel-burning appliances. Regular maintenance by a qualified technician and safe use of this equipment are key activities to help prevent a carbon monoxide hazard.

What can I do to prevent a CO hazard?

The Carbon Monoxide Awareness Committee recommends annual inspection and maintenance of all fuel-burning appliances, venting systems and chimneys by a qualified service technician. Regularly maintained appliances that are properly ventilated should not produce hazardous levels of carbon monoxide.

If you are adding a new fuel-burning appliance or making changes to your home's ventilation system, please consult a qualified heating contractor to ensure that your home is safe from CO hazards.

Finally, to keep safe, please remember:

- You have a responsibility to inform yourself about the dangers of carbon monoxide. Your knowledge and actions may save you and your family.
- Carbon monoxide detectors are a good second line of defence but they do not eliminate the need for regular inspection, maintenance and safe use of your fuel-burning appliances.
- Take the time to learn about CO detectors in your home to ensure you are using this equipment properly and effectively.

Who we are...

The Carbon Monoxide Awareness Committee is comprised of representatives from the fuels industry, government, regulatory authorities, standards and certification agencies, fire services, public utilities and appliance manufacturers (including HRAI). The Committee is committed to an ongoing, co-ordinated approach to protecting the public against the hazards of CO through greater awareness and understanding.