

S A F E T Y N O T E S

Carbon Monoxide Safety February, 2017



As the winter weather continues, many turn to alternate heating sources to stay warm. In addition to the added fire risk with space heaters, potential for carbon monoxide exposure increases this time of year. Carbon monoxide, also called CO, is a gas that you cannot see, taste, or smell. It is often called “the invisible killer.” It is created when fossil fuels such as kerosene, gasoline, coal, natural gas, propane, methane or wood do not burn completely. In addition to generators and alternate heating sources causing potential CO exposure, poisoning can result from malfunctioning or improperly vented furnaces, water heaters, clothes dryers or cars left running in the garage.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, the danger of CO exposure depends on a number of variables including a person’s health and activity level. Infants, pregnant women, and people with physical conditions that limit the body's ability to use oxygen (i.e. asthma, heart disease) can be more severely affected by lower concentrations of CO than healthy adults would. A person can be poisoned by a small amount of CO over a longer period of time or by a large amount of CO over a shorter amount of time.

Knowing about the danger of CO and symptoms can help save a life. Symptoms of CO poisoning include: headache, nausea, and drowsiness. Symptoms of low-level CO poisoning can be confused with food poisoning or the flu. Even moderate levels of CO exposure can cause death if headaches, dizziness and nausea are ignored until the person is unable to respond.

If you suspect that you have been exposed to CO the Spokane Fire Department recommends you seek immediate medical attention. If the CO alarm activates in your residence quickly evacuate and call 911 once safely outside. Upon arrival, Spokane Fire Department personnel will measure the CO levels in your home as well as evaluate the people who may have been exposed to unhealthy levels of CO.

WASHINGTON STATE RENTAL PROPERTY REGULATIONS

RCW19.27.530 was enacted to protect tenants from CO exposure and poisoning. By January 1, 2013, CO alarm installation was required on every level and outside every sleeping area in all rental units.

If you were an early adopter of this policy, 2017 is the year to start reviewing your current CO alarms. The expected life span of a CO alarm varies between five to seven years, depending on the brand. Replace the alarm according to the manufacturer's instructions or when the end of life signal sounds.

FREQUENTLY ASKED CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM QUESTIONS

What type of Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarm should I get?

Functions of the alarm vary based on price, brand, and personal preference. It is important to choose a CO alarm that is listed by a qualified testing laboratory. Some CO alarms contain small LED screens that indicate the parts per million of CO in the air. These are helpful for determining the current levels of CO exposure. A CO alarm is not a substitute for smoke alarms and vice versa. Know the difference between the sounds of each alarm.

Where should I install the CO alarm?

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and state guidelines require the placement of a CO alarm outside each separate sleeping area and on every level of the home. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines when installing whichever unit you select. Some alarms are installed at ceiling level while others are plugged into outlets just a few feet from the floor. Since carbon monoxide particles essentially distribute themselves evenly throughout the room, either placement is allowed.



Additional questions?

Contact the Spokane Fire Department Community Risk Reduction team if you have any questions about CO alarms, smoke alarms, evacuation planning, or general fire safety for your specific living situation 625.7058 or email jmcintyre@spokanefire.org

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting **Jamie McIntyre** at jmcintyre@spokanefire.org or by calling 509.625.7058



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