Carbon Monoxide Can Kill



Safety Talk

When fuel is burned, carbon monoxide is a byproduct. This gas kills thousands of people at work and at home each year.

Carbon monoxide gas, known as CO, is invisible, odorless, and tasteless.

The victim of carbon monoxide exposure can lose consciousness without warning and die.

A survivor of CO poisoning can end up with damaged heart, brain, lungs, kidneys or nervous system. Carbon monoxide replaces oxygen in the human bloodstream so the brain and other vital organs are deprived of oxygen.

Good maintenance of furnaces, engines and other equipment can make the fuel burn better and decrease the amount of carbon monoxide created. Correct installation and maintenance of ventilation equipment can go a long way toward preventing carbon monoxide exposure.

To protect yourself at work and home, recognize the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Sleepiness
- Fatigue
- Pain or tightness across the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea

If exposure continues, you become confused, weak, vomit, convulse and eventually collapse.

How much time do you have?

The time it takes to cause damage depends on:

- How much CO is in the air
- How long you’ve been exposed
- Your state of health

People with lung or heart diseases, the elderly and children are vulnerable to carbon monoxide poisoning. Smokers are susceptible because their blood already contains carbon byproducts. Barbiturates, alcohol, and high altitudes increase risk. A pregnant woman might suffer exposure without long-term damage, but the fetus may not survive.

How can you rescue yourself?

- Open windows and doors
- Turn off fuel-burning appliances
- Leave the building
- Seek medical attention.

What if you think someone else is a CO victim?

- Quickly move victim into fresh air
- Call 911 or emergency assistance
- Administer oxygen
- Start cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Workplace locations where workers employees could encounter carbon monoxide include:

- A kitchen with a malfunctioning gas oven or range
- Gas-powered water heater in need of servicing
- An underground parking garage
- Air intake located on a loading dock
- A boiler room where ventilation is defective
- A laundry department with gas-fueled appliances that aren’t working properly

If you feel sleepy and disoriented at work, it could mean lack of oxygen caused by CO. Get to fresh air immediately and report the problem before it becomes an emergency.