



Carbon Monoxide



Richmond Fire Prevention
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New technology has made it possible to produce a low-cost, reliable carbon monoxide (CO) alarm for the home. But why do we need a CO alarm? Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas. It causes about 300 accidental fatalities in homes each year; thousands more are treated in hospitals for CO poisoning. Carbon monoxide combines with hemoglobin in our blood and robs the blood of the oxygen our body needs. Early symptoms of exposure include headache, fatigue, nausea, and confused thinking (so victims can not think clearly enough to get assistance). Without treatment, the victim will lose consciousness, and if no help is given will lose their life.

Carbon monoxide is produced by combustion. Common causes are:

1. Defective gas or oil furnaces and water heaters
2. Cracked chimney flues
3. Indoor use of charcoal grills
4. Use of a gas oven or range to warm a room
5. Running a car in an enclosed area
6. Closing the fireplace damper before the fire is completely out

Carbon monoxide accidents are preventable. Actions you should take to protect your family are:

- Every fall you should have a qualified technician inspect your gas furnace and appliances.
- Never allow your car to run in an enclosed area, especially if it is attached to your house.
- Make sure your fireplace is in good repair and do not close the damper before the fire is out.
- Install CO alarms to give your family a warning if CO is building up in your house.

Several types of CO alarms are on the market. One type is plugged into a wall socket and has a life of about 10 years. The other type of alarm uses a chemical sensor and battery. The sensor/battery unit has a two year limited warranty and does indicate a low battery by beeping once a minute. To keep this alarm operating properly, the sensor/battery must be replaced when the battery is low. CO alarms can be purchased at many local hardware and small appliance stores at a cost of

\$35 to \$50. Make sure the alarm that you purchase has an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.

Regardless of the alarm you choose, there are some things you need to know. Carbon monoxide alarms should be located on every floor and mounted according to the manufacture's instructions. If the alarm goes off, everyone should get out of the house at once and call the fire department by dialing 911 from a neighbor's house. Do not ventilate your house by opening doors and windows. When the fire department personnel arrive they will obtain CO readings in different areas of your home to determine the source of the CO.

Another very important point to remember is that you still need a working smoke alarm on every level of your home. The CO alarm does not sense smoke or fire. Smoke alarms are needed to give your family early warning if there is a fire in your home.

If you are concerned about whether your furnace and/or appliances are working properly, contact your service technician to have an inspection. If you have questions about your gas furnace or appliances, contact the gas company. If your CO alarm gives a warning signal, get out of the house and call 911 from a neighbor's house.