



BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT

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Carbon Monoxide Poisoning – The Silent Killer

What is Carbon Monoxide (CO)?

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas produced by wood burning stoves, charcoal grills, furnaces, dryers, gas ovens, fireplaces, portable generators, and car /truck engines. Electrical equipment does not produce carbon monoxide.

What situations can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning?

Normally the amount of carbon monoxide produced by the sources listed above isn't a problem. However, if the equipment is not working properly or if it is operated in a closed or in a partially closed space, such as using a charcoal grill indoors or running your car in a closed garage, CO can build to dangerous levels. Smoke inhalation during a fire also can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. A person can be poisoned by a small amount over a long period of time or by a large amount over a shorter period of time.

Who is most at risk?

Exposure to carbon monoxide is potentially dangerous for anyone – especially someone who is sleeping or intoxicated/sedated because the fumes can enter the body, undetected, through breathing. Older adults, young children especially infants, smokers, and those with chronic heart or lung disease are especially susceptible to the effects of CO poisoning.

What are the warning signs?

Symptoms can be subtle and are often confused with the flu, food poisoning or other illnesses. They can include a dull headache (the most common early symptom), weakness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and lightheadedness, shortness of breath, unclear thinking and loss of motor control. More severe symptoms include seizures and loss of consciousness that can lead to death.

What should be done if CO poisoning is suspected?

Leave the area immediately if a carbon monoxide detector's warning signal goes off or if you/anyone in the home feels sick, weak or dizzy. Carbon monoxide poisoning is a medical emergency. Use a cell phone or a neighbor's phone to call 9-1-1. Stay away until emergency personnel have determined it is safe.

How can you prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?

Install carbon monoxide alarms certified by Underwriter Laboratories (UL) in your home outside all sleeping area and follow the instructions for use. Carbon monoxide and smoke alarms are not the same. Know the difference in sounds between the two. Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced regularly. Do not use a charcoal grill, camp stove, or other equipment or appliance designed for outdoor use in your home, basement, porch, shed or garage - opening windows and using fans does not prevent a build up of carbon monoxide. Connect generators properly – they need to have a special hookup installed. Do not run a car or truck inside a garage, especially one that is attached to a house. Do not burn anything in a stove or fireplace that is not properly vented. Never go to bed with a fire burning or smoldering.

Note: In 2005, a law was passed in Connecticut that requires the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in new one or two family buildings and in existing homes where alterations or additions requiring a permit occur.