

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a **silent killer**. Colorless, odorless and tasteless, it can invade your home without warning. As you breathe it in, the CO displaces the oxygen you need to survive. It quickly accumulates in your bloodstream, forming a toxic compound called carboxyhemoglobin (*car-box-see-HEE-muh-glow-bin*). Even in small quantities it can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness, irregular breathing, sleepiness, and confusion. In larger concentrations it leads to unconsciousness and death.

A properly installed CO alarm can alert you to the presence of carbon monoxide. If the alarm sounds, **GET OUT OF THE HOME QUICKLY**. Call the fire department from another location and ask them to check your home for the presence of carbon monoxide.

Sources of CO

Wherever there is incomplete combustion, there will be carbon monoxide. Some **causes of carbon monoxide poisoning in the home** include:

- a defective chimney
- improperly installed gas appliances (for example, a stove, cook top, or clothes dryer)
- car running in an attached garage
- barbecue used in an enclosed area
- gas or wood-burning fireplace
- corroded or disconnected vent pipe
- blocked vent
- cracked heat exchanger
- portable heater (for example, one fueled by gas, propane or kerosene).

Choosing a CO alarm

- Look for the CSA Blue Flame mark and reference CSA 6.19-01. This latest Canadian standard lets you know the alarm complies with recognized safety standards.
- **Know the requirements for your community.** In some regions, carbon monoxide alarms are mandatory for some buildings. Contact your local municipal office or fire department for details.
- Choose a alarm that makes a **clear loud noise** when it detects CO gas. That annoying noise could save a life.

- Choose a **suitable power source** for your purposes: battery operated, plug-in, or hardwired. Some plug-in or hardwired models have a battery backup so that the alarm will sound even if the electrical power is shut off.

Installation

- CO alarms should be placed near sleeping areas but alarm owners should also consider having them on each floor or close to anything that burns fuel - like a furnace or gas water heater.
- Keep household chemicals-such as butane, nail polish remover, rubbing alcohol, and propane away from your CO alarm. Over time, these could affect the sensing device, which could lead to false alarms.

Maintenance

- Similar to smoke alarms, CO alarms should be tested regularly following the manufacturer's instructions. Newer models may have a built in system for testing.
- **Change the batteries at least twice a year**-for example, when you change your clocks if you live in a zone that has Daylight Savings Time. Be sure to use the correct type of batteries.
- Save the manufacturer's instructions. These instructions outline how and where to install the device, how and how often to test it, how long it should last and how to dispose of it.
- Detectors wired directly into a home's electrical system should be tested monthly. Units operating off a battery should be tested weekly and have their battery replaced at least once a year.