

Bangon - 12.24.11 - Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Staying safe over the holidays demands us to be mindful of burning candles, over used extension cords and smoke alarms. Unfortunately, the very real danger from carbon monoxide can easily be forgotten.

So, how can you protect your family? First, make sure carbon monoxide never enters your home. Second, install at least one CO detector in your home.

Here a few tips from a comprehensive fact sheet from CMHC - www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/maho/yohoyohe/inaiqu/inaiqu_002.cfm

Because you can't see, taste or smell carbon monoxide (CO), even at low levels, it can affect you before you even know it's there. CO is harmful because it will rapidly accumulate in the blood, depleting the ability of blood to carry oxygen.

Carbon monoxide is a common by-product of the combustion (burning) of fossil fuels. Most fuel-burning equipment (natural gas, propane and oil), if properly installed and maintained, produces little CO and can usually be safely vented to the outside. However, blockages such as a bird's nest in the chimney, can result in a shortage of oxygen to the burner, causing CO to quickly rise to dangerous levels.

To minimize the risk of CO in your home:

- * Have a qualified technician inspect fuel-burning appliances, chimneys, vents and fireplaces before the cold weather sets in, to ensure against blockages (e.g., bird's nests, twigs, old mortar), corrosion or holes.
- * If you have a powerful kitchen exhaust fan or downdraft cooktop,
- * Have a qualified technician check powerful kitchen exhaust fans or downdraft cooktops to ensure they don't pull fumes back down the chimney.
- * Never use propane or natural gas stove tops or ovens to heat your home.
- * Always open the garage doors before you start your vehicle. Pull the car out immediately onto the driveway, then close the garage door to prevent exhaust fumes from being drawn into the house.
- * Do not use a remote automobile starter when the car is in the garage; even if the garage doors are open.
- * Never operate the following indoors or inside an attached garage - propane, natural gas or charcoal barbecue grills, kerosene space heaters, lawnmowers, snowblowers, gasoline-powered whipper-snippers or pressure washers.
- * Regularly clean the clothes dryer ductwork and outside vent cover for blockages such as lint, snow, or overgrown outdoor plants.

Most CO detectors are designed to give an alarm when CO levels reach a high-level in a short time. However, health agencies advise that long term, low-level exposure is also of concern, especially for unborn and young children, elderly and those with a history of heart or respiratory problems. Detectors that can display both high and low levels are more expensive but provide greater accuracy and information.

Detectors should be tested monthly and replaced according to manufacturer's specifications.

Detectors should be placed close to sleeping areas. CO distributes evenly throughout a room, so a detector can be placed at any height in any location.

If your detector sounds an alarm:

- * evacuate the house, including pets and do a head count
- * if anyone is suffering from flu-like symptoms, call 911
- * if you **can identify** the source, then remove it or turn it off
- * ventilate the house
- * reset the alarm
- * do not re-occupy the house until the alarm ceases
- * take steps to avoid this situation in the future.
- * if you **can't identify** the source, call your gas utility, heating contractor or the fire department to have your house tested; do not re-occupy til it has been tested.

Take care, enjoy your family and the holidays, and stay protected.