



Fast Facts about Carbon Monoxide Alarms



OFTEN CALLED THE INVISIBLE KILLER, carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas created when fuels — gasoline, wood, charcoal, natural gas, propane, oil, and methane — burn incompletely.

Equipment and vehicles powered by internal combustion engines are a common source of carbon monoxide. Vehicles running in an attached garage or generators running inside a home or attached garage, can quickly produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

The dangers of CO depend on a number of variables, including the person's health and activity level. Infants, pregnant women, and people with physical conditions that limit their body's ability to use oxygen can be more severely affected by lower concentrations of CO than healthy adults would be.

A person can be poisoned by a small amount of CO over a longer period of time or by a large amount of CO over a shorter amount of time.

Low level CO poisoning can often be confused with **flu symptoms**, food poisoning, and other illnesses. Some symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, lightheadedness or headaches. When extremely high CO levels are present, confusion, incapacitation and loss of consciousness can occur within minutes.

In 2010, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated 80,100 non-fire CO incidents in which CO was found, or an average of nine calls per hour. According to the NFPA, this represents an **increase of 96 percent** from 40,900 reported in 2003.

CO incidents are more common **during the colder months**. During the period 2006 to 2010 half of CO incidents reported to local fire departments across the U.S. occurred between the months of November and February, peaking in December.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that from 1999–2010, an average of 430 people per year were killed by unintentional CO poisoning from a variety of consumer products and motor vehicles.

Interconnected CO alarms offer the best protection; when one sounds, they all do. A licensed electrician can install hard-wired interconnected CO alarms, or homeowners can install wireless alarms, plug-in alarms, or battery operated alarms.

