

Carbon Monoxide

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning kills over 400 people every year and sends over 100,000 people to hospital emergency rooms. CO is a odorless and colorless gas. It hinders the blood's ability to deliver oxygen to the body. The following are the sources of CO, its health effects and symptoms of exposure, and prevention tips to avoid CO poisoning.

What are Sources of Carbon Monoxide?

CO is produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon containing fuels. Examples of such fuels include:

- Unvented space heaters burning fuel oil or propane
- Barbecues, wood stoves, or furnaces burning wood, charcoal, or natural gas
- Stoves, fireplaces, and water heaters burning natural gas
- Internal combustion engines burning gasoline, LPG, diesel fuel, or natural gas

Symptoms/Health Effects of Carbon Monoxide Exposure

- Headaches, dizziness, weakness, vomiting, chest pain, confusion, loss of consciousness, nausea, and even death can result from CO poisoning.
- CO poisoning can be difficult to detect because the symptoms frequently resemble the flu or other illnesses. CO poisoning can kill people who are sleeping or intoxicated before they show any symptoms.
- Pregnant women, infants, the elderly, and people with heart or respiratory illnesses are especially vulnerable to CO poisoning.

Tips to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas and test the CO detector monthly (e.g., dorms, off-campus housing).
- If you have concerns about CO in your work area, contact EH&S to perform an air quality check
- Have the gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced frequently.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a BBQ indoors.
- Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
- Do not use gas ovens or gas ranges to heat living areas.
- Do not use unvented gas or kerosene space heaters in enclosed spaces.
- Do not leave a car or gas-powered equipment (e.g., emergency generator) running in any enclosed space.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: What to Do

Don't ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them. If you think you are suffering from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning:

- Exit the area immediately and get fresh air.
- Go to an emergency room, if necessary. Be sure to tell the physician that you suspect CO poisoning.
- DO NOT return until the area is cleared by the agency/authority having jurisdiction.

References

- Centers for Disease Control- [Carbon Monoxide \(CO\) Poisoning Prevention](#)

