

CARBON MONOXIDE

Keeping Your Church Safe

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a deadly gas which can be created during the combustion of organic compounds (fuel) with limited amounts of oxygen. Appliances, such as gas fires, boilers, central heating systems, water heaters, cookers, and open fires which use gas, oil, coal and wood may be possible sources of CO gas. It happens when the fuel does not burn fully. Running a car engine in an enclosed space can cause CO poisoning. Carbon monoxide is: odorless, colorless, lighter than air, and collects in pockets.

Symptoms of CO Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is absorbed into the bloodstream 200 times faster than oxygen. A concentration of just one percent in the air you breathe can kill you in five minutes. Death is caused by suffocation due to lack of oxygen.

Since CO is odorless and colorless, you will not know that you are being suffocated. CO is detected only by special instruments. If there is CO in the air you are breathing, you may experience “flu like” symptoms. For this reason, you may not even know you are experiencing CO poisoning.

- * Headache
- * Nausea
- * Fast heart rate
- * Chest Pain
- * Dizziness
- * Fainting
- * Ringing in ears

If you are in an enclosed area and experience any of these symptoms move to fresh air immediately. Seek medical attention if CO poisoning is suspected.

Prevention of CO Poisoning

- Install a battery-operated or battery back-up CO detector and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Consider buying a detector with a digital readout. This detector can tell you the highest level of CO concentration in addition to alarming. Replace your CO detector every five years.
- Have your heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters indoors.
- When you buy gas equipment, buy only equipment carrying the seal of a national testing agency, such as Underwriters' Laboratories.

- Make sure your gas appliances are vented properly.
- Have your chimney checked/cleaned every year. Chimneys can be blocked by debris which can cause CO build up.
- Never patch a vent pipe with tape, gum, or something else. This kind of patch can make CO build up.
- Never use a gas range or oven for heating. Using a gas range or oven for heating can cause a build up of CO.
- Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal – red, gray, black, or white – gives off CO.
- Never use a portable gas camp stove indoors. Using a gas camp stove indoors can cause CO to build up.
- Never use a generator inside or less than 20 feet from any window, door, or vent.

In vehicles:

- Have a mechanic check the exhaust system of your vehicles every year. A small leak in the exhaust system can lead to a build up of CO inside the car.
- Never run your vehicle inside a garage even with the door open. Always open a door to let in fresh air.
- If you drive a car or SUV with a tailgate, when you open the tailgate open the vents or windows to make sure air is moving through. If only the tailgate is open CO from the exhaust will be pulled into the car or SUV.

SOURCE: <https://www.cdc.gov/co/default.htm>