

The New Carbon Monoxide Law and What It Means for Your Safety

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Carbon monoxide has been dubbed the “silent killer” due to the danger posed to those unknowingly breathing it. According to The National Safety Council, 200-300 unintentional-injury deaths a year are due to carbon monoxide poisoning. The State of Minnesota 2006 legislative session passed a new carbon monoxide law requiring CO alarms in all single family homes and multifamily apartment units. The law is effective January 1st, 2007 for all newly constructed single family homes and August 1st, 2008 for all existing single family homes. The operational CO alarm shall be installed within ten (10) feet of each room lawfully used for sleeping purposes. If bedrooms are located on separate floors, additional CO alarms would be necessary within ten (10) feet of these areas.

CO is the leading cause of poisoning that can cause death. CO is an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas. Your senses can't detect its presence. It is produced by anything in your home that burns fuel inefficiently. It has many sources, which might include: gas dryer, furnace, stove/burner, water heater, fireplace, automobile fumes and portable heaters. Smoking is another common source of CO that impacts indoor air quality.

Carbon monoxide prevents oxygen from going to the red blood cells of the body. Because the brain and heart are very sensitive to a lack of oxygen, symptoms that might be experienced are: headache, nausea/vomiting, dizziness, confusion and drowsiness. At higher levels it can result in unconsciousness or death. A telltale sign might be that multiple people in the same home complaining of these symptoms. People most vulnerable to the effects of CO include pregnant women, the elderly, small children, people with lung or heart problems or others with chronic health conditions, and people engaging in strenuous physical activity.

A CO alarm can be purchased at most hardware and department stores. The fire department recommends one with an audible alarm and *digital* readout that is UL listed.

CO is a gas that is the same density as air, so it does not matter if you put the detector high or low. Do not place it near areas that affect a true reading, such as the furnace, kitchen, doors to outside, and windows. Place it within ten (10) feet of your bedrooms and is in a “high traffic” area (for frequent checks). All homes should have a CO alarm and smoke alarms. A smoke alarm *does not* replace the need for a CO alarm.

CO alarms are designed to go off before an average healthy adult has onset of symptoms. The detector should read “0”. If the number rises, you can do something about it before it goes to an alarm or symptom stage. *If you do not have symptoms of CO poisoning*, but your alarm is going off, turn off all possible sources of carbon monoxide, open all your windows and doors and call your gas company. *If you do have symptoms* and the alarm is going off; evacuate the home and call 911. This is a medical emergency!

Protect those in your home from CO poisoning by making sure your heating system and all fuel-burning appliances are adequately vented and maintained. Don’t use gasoline engines or burn charcoal in enclosed spaces. Have your furnace and water heater checked *once a year* by a qualified technician. *Your safety begins with prevention.*