

## Carbon Monoxide Safety Is Extremely Important During Winter

With winter here, most people are closing their windows and turning up the heat. These actions increase the risk of poisoning by carbon monoxide (CO), a silent but deadly gas responsible for hundreds of deaths each year. Because people cannot smell, taste, or see it, they do not realize when they are breathing in carbon monoxide. Although carbon monoxide poisoning poses threats for everyone, infants, children, senior citizens, and those with respiratory problems have increased risks.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can adversely affect health in many ways and high levels of the deadly gas can cause death. Breathing high levels of carbon monoxide can cause breathing and vision impairments, reduced brain function, loss of consciousness, and death. Since symptoms of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning can be mistaken for the flu, people often overlook them. Some symptoms of breathing low levels of carbon monoxide include headaches, dizziness, confusion, and drowsiness. If you believe you are suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning, seek medical attention immediately.

Since carbon monoxide is so deadly, it is important to remember not to take chances. Here are some helpful tips that can lower your risks and could save your life.

- Have a qualified technician clean and inspect all combustion equipment each year. This includes gas furnaces, gas or kerosene space heaters, wood-burning or gas fireplaces, and gas water heaters.
- If you encounter a problem with your furnace and can't stay warm, do not use kitchen ovens or gas ranges for additional heat. This is very dangerous.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors in your home and anywhere else you use gas heating appliances. Test periodically to make sure they are working properly.
- Install and use exhaust fans vented to outdoors over gas stoves.
- Open flues when using fireplaces.
- Never warm a car or run any motor appliance inside your garage. Even with the garage door open, carbon monoxide can build up rapidly and cause poisoning within minutes.
- Never use a charcoal or propane grill inside your home or garage.
- Avoid the use of gas or kerosene space heaters inside your home. If you can't avoid using them, follow operating instructions very carefully and always make sure there is an open window for ventilation.
- If you use a gasoline or other fuel-fired generator during a power outage, keep the generator outdoors during use. If the generator is indoors, your house could quickly fill up with deadly carbon monoxide gas as the fuel burns.
- If your carbon monoxide alarm goes off, exit your house or apartment quickly and call 911 or your local emergency number. Don't re-enter your home until the problem is fixed. See a doctor immediately, even if you don't feel any symptoms, because carbon monoxide can remain in the blood.

For more information on carbon monoxide poisoning or other home maintenance topics, contact your local county extension office.

*Source: Linda Adler, M.A. Extension Specialist for Home Furnishings*

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