

# CARBON MONOXIDE

Mid-fall is the start of the Carbon Monoxide (CO) season. This is when we start firing up furnaces, wood burners, space heaters and the like. And when we button up our homes, shops and garages to keep out drafts, we also seal in CO. That makes it especially imperative to get the word out about the dangers of CO poisoning.

## Warning Symptoms

CO is known as "the silent killer." That's because it kills without warning. CO gas is odorless and colorless. CO displaces the oxygen from your blood stream (thus the red face) and exposure to high levels can be fatal.

Symptoms of CO poisoning can easily be mistaken or explained away as lack of sleep or mild flu. So the first thing you need to do is warn your employees and make them aware of the symptoms of CO poisoning, including:

- Headaches
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Disorientation
- Unusually red cheeks

If anyone in your household is experiencing these symptoms, move them to a well-ventilated area and get medical attention.

## Inspect for Sources of CO

To reduce the risk of CO poisoning in your home or shop, you should conduct a pre-winter inspection of common CO sources, such as:

- Furnaces
- Fireplaces
- Space heaters (other than electric ones)
- Gas-fired appliances, including stoves or grills
- Hot water heaters

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Installation Safety Office

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As part of your inspection:

- Have a qualified technician inspect and clean your heating system (even a new furnace may have a cracked heat exchanger);
- Ensure that chimneys and flues are clear of animal or bird nests;
- Ensure that summer junk isn't blocking vents, flues or the immediate area around space heaters.

Generally, any internal combustion engine or anything burning a fossil fuel should be inspected.

## Other Pointers

In addition to inspecting CO sources, there are other ways you can reduce the risk of CO poisoning in your home:

- Even in emergencies, do not use your kitchen stove as a heater;
- Don't grill with propane or charcoal indoors;
- Avoid running any internal combustion engine inside a garage or shed.

## Conclusion

Invest in your family's safety by buying a carbon monoxide detector for the home, garage and the workshop - one that is warranted and has UL approval. Or buy a smoke detector that has a CO detector built-in. The life saved may literally be your own!