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Frequently Asked Questions About Carbon Monoxide

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon Monoxide, known by its chemical name CO, is a poisonous gas. It is colorless, odorless and readily mixes in the air. Because you can't see, taste or smell CO, it can build up to dangerous levels in your home before you know it's there.

Why is carbon monoxide so dangerous?

CO is breathed in through the lungs and bonds with the hemoglobin in the blood. This interferes with your blood's oxygen-carrying capacity. Your body cannot deliver enough oxygen to your vital organs to keep them functioning properly. The presence of this poisonous compound in your blood can cause symptoms similar to the flu such as fatigue, headaches, dizziness and confusion. As toxic levels increase, symptoms can include nausea, vomiting or loss of consciousness. Exposure to extremely high levels of CO can cause brain damage or death.

Where does carbon monoxide come from?

Carbon monoxide is a by-product of incomplete combustion. It is produced to some extent whenever fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, coal, wood, gasoline or kerosene are burned. Excessive amounts of CO can be produced by defective, fuel-burning, appliances. These include gas stoves, furnaces, boilers, water heaters, gas grills, automobiles, lawnmowers and snow blowers. Any device that depends on burning a fuel for heat or energy can pose a threat if not operating properly.

What are some of the common sources of carbon monoxide?

Common causes of CO include a blocked or poorly ventilated fireplace chimney or furnace flue, damaged heating equipment and malfunctioning space heaters. Another common source is the operation of cars or other gasoline-powered equipment inside an unventilated garage.

How can I protect my family from carbon monoxide?

Because carbon monoxide is produced from defective equipment, it is recommended that all heating and cooking appliances be serviced at least annually. Be certain that all chimneys and flues are clean and in good working condition. Follow manufacturer's recommendations for operation of portable

heating appliances. Do not idle cars or other gas-powered motors in the garage or where the exhaust could be drawn into the house. Consider purchasing and installing a carbon monoxide detector in your home. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and operation.

What should I do if my CO Detector alarms or I suspect the presence of CO in my home?

Call 911. The emergency call taker will ask you several questions. Explain the nature of your emergency. Advise the call taker if anyone in your house is exhibiting any medical symptoms. Get everyone out of the house. The Fire Department will respond and investigate using carbon-monoxide-sensing metering equipment. We will attempt to locate the source if high levels of CO are found. Defective equipment will be turned off and the house can be ventilated to remove the CO. It will be the homeowner's responsibility to arrange for qualified service or repairs of faulty equipment, once the Fire Department has determined that it is safe to re-enter the house.