

State Fire Marshall Asks "Is a Silent Killer in Your Home?"

Local News

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Washington State - Carbon monoxide (CO) is a toxic gas created as a result of incomplete combustion. The fumes are odorless and colorless creating a potential danger to residential occupants. There are several sources within the home that generate CO including gas-fired appliances, charcoal grills, wood-burning furnaces or fireplaces, and motor vehicles. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 500 people die and another 20,000 are treated annually throughout the United States for CO exposure or poisoning.

"Protect your family from this silent killer. Become familiar with appliances and equipment in your home which produce carbon monoxide and take steps to prevent CO exposure," says State Fire Marshal Mike Matlick.

Since CO fumes cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted, they can cause illness or death without notice. When CO is breathed in at lower levels, the effects may be mistaken for flu-like symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea, and fatigue. The length of exposure and overall health of the individual being exposed can cause symptoms to vary.

The following safety tips are recommended:

- Install listed carbon monoxide alarms with audible warning signal near the sleeping area and outside individual bedrooms. CO alarms are designed to sound an alarm before the average, healthy adult would experience symptoms.
- Annually, have a qualified professional inspect fuel burning appliances, furnaces, venting, and chimney systems.
- Never use cooking ranges or ovens in place of central heating.
- Never use generators, charcoal grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, including the basement or garage.
- Never leave cars running in a garage. Dangerous buildup of CO can still occur with garage doors open.

If a CO detector alarms, the following steps are recommended:

If no one is feeling ill:

Silence the alarm.

Turn off all appliances and sources of combustion (i.e., furnace and fireplace).

Ventilate the house with fresh air by opening doors and windows.

Call a qualified professional to investigate the source of the possible CO buildup.

Consult with your doctor.

If illness is a factor:

Evacuate all occupants immediately.

Determine how many occupants are ill and identify their symptoms.

Call your local emergency number and when relaying information to the dispatcher, include the number of people feeling ill.

Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department representative.

Call a qualified professional to repair the source of the CO.

Additional information related to carbon monoxide may be found on the United States Fire Administration's web site at www.usfa.dhs.gov or the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's web site at www.cdc.gov.