

"For safety's sake—do something."

Carbon Monoxide – the Silent Killer

Each year, Carbon Monoxide (CO) kills more than 400 people, hospitalizes almost 5,000 people, and is responsible for more than 20,000 hospital visits. Everyone is at risk of CO poisoning in both the home and the workplace.

What is CO?

CO is a poisonous, colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas. Although it has no detectable odor, CO is often mixed with other gases that do have an odor. So, you can inhale CO with gases that you can smell and not even know that CO is present. CO is a common industrial hazard resulting from the incomplete burning of natural gas and any other material containing carbon such as gasoline, kerosene, oil, propane, coal, or wood. Forges, blast furnaces, and coke ovens produce CO, but one of the most common sources of exposure in the workplace is the internal combustion engine. CO is found many times in the home also and from many of the same means as in an industrial setting. Gas appliances like furnaces, stoves, and hot water tanks are the primary culprits of exposure in the home.

How does CO harm you?

CO is harmful when breathed because it displaces oxygen in the blood and deprives the heart, brain, and other vital organs of oxygen. Large amounts of CO can overcome you in minutes without warning—causing you to lose consciousness and suffocate. Besides tightness across the chest, initial symptoms of CO poisoning may include headache, fatigue, dizziness, drowsiness, or nausea. Sudden chest pain may occur in people with angina. During prolonged or high exposures, symptoms may worsen and include vomiting, confusion, and collapse in addition to the loss of consciousness and muscle weakness. Symptoms vary widely from person to person. CO poisoning may occur sooner in those most susceptible: young children, elderly people, people with lung or heart disease, people at high altitudes, or those who already have elevated CO blood levels, such as smokers. Also, CO poisoning poses a special risk to fetuses. CO poisoning can be reversed if caught in time. But even if you recover, acute poisoning may result in permanent damage to the parts of your body that require a lot of oxygen such as the heart and brain. Significant reproductive risk is also linked to CO.

How can you prevent CO exposures?

The best way is to perform regular maintenance on all of your gas tools and appliances by a qualified service person. Install a CO monitor near sleeping areas and other common areas to alert you to an issue. If the device is battery operated, be sure to change the batteries at the semiannual time change, just like your smoke detectors. On your vehicles, make sure to have the exhaust system checked annually to ensure there are no leaks and never run your vehicle inside of an enclosed space.

**Safety Scott says,
"Safety always is
ALWAYS!"**