

CARBON MONOXIDE – THE SILENT KILLER

For the safety of all residents, Carbon monoxide (CO) alarms have been installed in each of the homes on Presidio of Monterey, La Mesa and Ord Military Community, many others are installed in rental units and private homes throughout the area; however, it cannot be assumed that everyone is familiar with the hazards of carbon monoxide poisoning in the home. Often called the silent killer, carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created by burning organic fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, propane, etc.) In the home, heating and cooking equipment that burn fuel are potential sources of carbon monoxide. Vehicles or generators running in an attached garage can also produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

Facts & figures

According to the National Safety Council, 200-300 unintentional-injury deaths a year are due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

- The dangers of CO exposure depend on a number of variables, including the victim's health and activity level. Infants, pregnant women, and people with physical conditions that limit their body's ability to use oxygen (i.e. emphysema, asthma, heart disease) can be more severely affected by lower concentrations of CO than healthy adults would be.
- A person can be poisoned by a small amount of CO over a longer period of time or by a large amount of CO over a shorter amount of time.

Symptoms of CO poisoning

CO enters the body through breathing and it replaces the oxygen in the blood. CO poisoning can be confused with flu symptoms, food poisoning and other illnesses. Some symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light-headedness or headaches. High levels of CO can be fatal, causing death within minutes. The risk of CO poisoning is higher for infants, 4 years old or less, and for the elderly, 75 years or more.

Safety tips

- Call your local fire department's non-emergency number to find out what number to call if the CO alarm sounds. On OMC the number to call when the CO alarm sounds is (9-1-1). Post that number by your telephone(s). Make sure everyone in the household knows the difference between the fire emergency and CO emergency numbers (if there is a difference).
- Test CO alarms at least once a month and replace CO alarms according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- CO alarms are not substitutes for smoke alarms. Know the difference between the sound of smoke alarms and CO alarms.
- Have fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, space or portable heaters, etc.) and chimneys inspected by a professional every year before cold weather sets in.
- When purchasing new heating and cooking equipment, select products tested and labeled by an independent testing laboratory.
- When using a fireplace, open the flue for adequate ventilation.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- When buying an existing home, have a qualified technician evaluate the heating and cooking systems, as well as the sealed spaces between the garage and house.
- If you need to warm a vehicle, remove it from the garage immediately after starting it. Do not run a vehicle, generator, or other fueled engine or motor indoors, even if garage doors are open.
- Only use barbecue grills – which can produce CO – outside. Never use them in the home, garage or near building openings.
- When camping, remember to use battery-powered lights in tents trailers, and motor homes.

If your CO alarm sounds

- Immediately move to a fresh air location, leave the doors to the building open and call for help. Remain at the fresh air location until emergency personnel say it is ok.
- If anyone shows any symptoms mentioned above get them medical attention immediately
- If the audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries or other trouble indicators.