



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Reminds Vermonters to Prevent Exposure to Carbon Monoxide (CO)

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BURLINGTON – Each year, 30 to 50 Vermonters are exposed to carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that can be deadly during the home heating season.

“Carbon monoxide poisoning is the leading cause of poison-related death in the United States, and it is preventable,” said Sarah Vose, state toxicologist for the Vermont Department of Health. “A properly functioning carbon monoxide detector near all sleeping areas is the best protection.”

Combustion fumes from portable generators, wood-burning stoves, gas ranges and heating systems can lead to a potentially fatal build up of carbon monoxide in places that don't have a good flow of fresh air, or if heating systems are not maintained or vented properly, such as a vent that is blocked by snow.

Sixty-four percent of unintentional poisonings from carbon monoxide occur in the home.

“If your CO detector is going off and wakes you up, or during the day call 9-1-1 and leave the house immediately,” said Chris Herrick, chief of the Vermont HAZMAT Response Team. “Even though you may not see or smell anything the situation could be dangerous or even deadly.”

Symptoms can be mild (fatigue, headache, dizziness, nausea) or severe (loss of consciousness and death) and the level of exposure, such as how long and how much was inhaled, influences the recovery and the damage done. Most people who survive CO poisoning recover fully. Some, however, may have delayed symptoms. Mental abilities can be impaired and permanent brain damage can occur.

To make sure that you and your family are safe from carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Install a carbon monoxide detector near all sleeping areas in your home. If you have electrical power, use an electric-powered detector with battery backup. Replace the battery when changing the time on clocks each spring and fall.
- If the detector alarm sounds, leave your home immediately and call 9-1-1.
- Maintain heating equipment, gas, oil, or, coal burning appliances and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional.
- Have your wood stove, chimney, and venting system cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional at least once a year.
- Make sure that stove pipes and other types of vents are tightly joined and not cracked or rusty.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseous.
- Keep snow or ice from piling up outside a vent for a fuel-burning appliance.
- Never use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal burning device inside the home, basement, or garage, near a window, or under a tent.
- Never use a gas cooking range or oven to heat your home.
- Never run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if the door is left open.
- Do not burn anything in a stove or fireplace that is not vented or may be clogged.

CO alarms are not substitutes for smoke alarms. Know the difference between the sound of smoke alarms and the sound of CO alarms. Make sure everyone in the home (including guests) knows the sound and understands the warning of smoke and CO alarms and know how to respond.

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