# CARBON MONOXIDE

#### *What are the Health and Safety Risks?*

**C**arbon monoxide (CO) is a toxic gas. No amount is safe to breathe. CO cannot be seen, tasted, felt, or smelled. CO can make a person sick and can be fatal. Over 200 people in the United States die every year from CO poisoning.

Signs and symptoms of CO poisoning may include:

* Headache
* Nausea
* Vomiting
* Dizziness
* Confusion
* Weakness
* Sleepiness
* Tightness in the chest
* Trouble breathing
* Changes in sight, hearing, touch, taste or smell

Breathing low levels of CO can harm brains, hearts, and other organs. When a person breathes high levels of CO, they don’t get enough oxygen, may not be able to think clearly, and can lose control of muscles. In severe cases, the person might not be able to move to safety. High level CO poisoning can cause loss of consciousness, coma, and death. High CO levels from a fire can kill someone in less than a minute.

#### ***Where Do Carbon Monoxide Risks Come From?***

Fuel burning appliances are the main source of CO. Common fuels are natural gas, gasoline, kerosene, coal, propane, oil, or wood. CO can be produced at dangerous levels if fuel burning appliances aren’t vented or working right. Most fuel burning appliances are safe if they have been correctly installed and maintained. All fuel burning appliances need to be vented outside as unvented appliances are not safe. For example, a fireplace burns wood and smoke escapes out through the chimney. Likewise, other fuel appliances have chimneys or flues for the dangerous gases to escape. Electric appliances alternatively don’t burn fuel and don’t make CO.

Specific home sources of CO include:

* Furnaces, boilers, and water heaters that burn gas or oil
* Wood burning fireplaces and stoves
* Blocked chimneys and vents
* Gas appliances like ovens, stoves, and dryers
* Gas and kerosene space heaters
* Gas and charcoal grills
* Cars, trucks, campers, tractors, and other vehicles
* Gasoline powered equipment: lawn mowers, portable generators, snow blowers, chainsaws, or pressure washers
* Generators in campers and houseboats
* Tobacco smoke
* House fires



**What can you do to help the families**

**and communities you serve?**

*Actions for Living in a Healthy Home*

##### Family Health and Safety

To ensure safety in a home from the dangers of Carbon Monoxide, it is essential to advise families to:

* Go outside right away if they hear a smoke or CO alarm or if they smell natural gas. Families should be taught to treat any alarm as an emergency and never ignore it. They should then call 911 from a phone outside of their home and seek medical attention as needed.
* Read the manuals for all appliances and follow all instructions.
* Engage the services of a company that services home furnaces, chimneys, and appliances yearly.
* Vent all heating appliances outside and avoid blocking air openings or exhaust vents.
* Turn off any appliance that is not working right and call a qualified contractor or repair company.
* Never operate grills, generators or anything with an engine inside a home, garage, or basement.
* Always start lawn mowers, snow blowers and all yard equipment outdoors.
* Never use the kitchen stove or oven to heat their home. *familiestheirHave them ctheir, communityaction agency, .*
* Turn on the kitchen exhaust fan when using a gas oven or stove, and leave it on after it’s done for a half hour or more.

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##### CO Poisoning Prevention

##### Stakeholders need to provide outreach to consumers about the importance of:

* Putting CO alarms on every level of a home and in sleeping areas.
* Never leaving a vehicle running in the garage with the garage door closed. Doing so can cause CO poisoning, even if it is for just a couple of minutes.

##### Bad weather or disasters can cause the power go out. Some people use portable generators during these emergencies which are a high risk activity for CO poisoning for families unfamiliar on how to operate them safely.