

**CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING:**  
**THE SILENT KILLER AND A RISK THIS WINTER**

Maine CDC/DHHS 2008-2009

The Problem

- Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas and is produced whenever any fuel is burned, including gas, oil, kerosene, coal, charcoal, and wood. People cannot tell that it is present before symptoms are noticed. But, it is deadly and can kill quickly.
- CO is the leading cause of unintentional poisoning in the United States. It kills about 200 people every year. Three-quarters of CO poisoning happen in people's homes, and the most common source is home heating systems.
- These poisonings are caused by leaking or faulty furnaces or heaters, blocked chimneys or flues, vehicles left running in an attached garage, charcoal burned inside, and gasoline powered generators operated in a home, attached garage, or too close to windows or doors.
- Half of Maine households do not have a CO monitor. Residents of Cumberland are more likely to have a CO monitor; while residents of Aroostook are least likely to have a CO monitor.
- About 5 Mainers have died in the past several years due to CO poisoning. About 150 Mainers are hospitalized or seen in the emergency departments every year from CO poisoning that is not fire-related and non-intentional. The only official deaths from the 1998 ice storm were from CO poisoning.

What You Can Do To Prevent CO Poisoning

- **Keep a carbon monoxide monitor.**
  - Place CO detectors in the hallway near every sleeping area of the home and make sure furniture or curtains do not cover the detector.
  - Make sure the detector is battery powered or has a battery back-up so it will work when the power is out.
  - If battery powered, replace batteries at least once per year.
  - Purchase one with the Underwriter's Laboratory "UL" mark.
- **Place generators outdoors in a well ventilated location.**
  - Generators should be placed well away from home windows or doors.
  - Generators should not be placed in an enclosed or semi-enclosed space (such as basement, cellar bulkhead, attached garage) where carbon monoxide can build up to dangerous levels.
- **Use kerosene heaters in a well ventilated room.**
  - Keep doors to other rooms open and keep a window partially open (at least 1 inch).
  - Use only K-1 grade fuel in kerosene heaters.
  - Follow instructions for setting the wick height.
- **Do not use outdoor cooking devices indoors.**
  - Examples include gas or charcoal grills or gas camp stoves.
  - Do not use this equipment in a garage, vehicle, or tent.
- **Do not use indoor gas cooking stoves or ovens or clothes dryers for heat.**

- **Keep chimney flue and a window open when burning decorative gas fireplace logs as a heat source.**
- **Inspect and clean heating system** every year (including chimneys and vents).
- **Never leave a car running** in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- **Symptoms of CO poisoning** include flu-like symptoms such as headache, nausea, feeling tired, vomiting, dizziness, and shortness of breath. CO does not cause a fever.
  - People who have heart or lung disease may notice these symptoms are worse. For instance, those with heart disease will often feel more chest pain as a result of high CO levels.
  - At higher or prolonged levels of CO, symptoms include disorientation, sleepiness, unconsciousness, and death.
- **If the CO detector sounds an alarm, go outside immediately to breathe fresh air and call 911.**

#### FMI

Maine Governor's Stay Safe and Warm Website

[http://www.maine.gov/governor/baldacci/contact/citizen\\_services/safeandwarm.html](http://www.maine.gov/governor/baldacci/contact/citizen_services/safeandwarm.html)

Maine CDC/DHHS Carbon Monoxide Website

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/eohp/air/co.htm>

211 Maine

<http://www.211maine.org/>

US CDC Carbon Monoxide Information Page

<http://www.cdc.gov/co/Default.htm>

US CDC Carbon Monoxide PSA Scripts

<http://www.cdc.gov/co/psa.htm>

Consumer Product Safety Commission Carbon Monoxide FAQ

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/466.html>

American Lung Association Carbon Monoxide Fact Sheet

<http://www.lungusa.org/site/c.dvLUK9O0E/b.4061173/apps/s/content.asp?ct=67136>