

City of Whitefish Fire Department

also serving the Whitefish Fire Service Area

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CARBON MONOXIDE: THE INVISIBLE KILLER

I don't have to worry about carbon monoxide poisoning in my home because I'll smell a leak in time to get out safely.

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Tragically, that kind of thinking can prove deadly.

Here are the facts: Carbon monoxide (CO) has no odor. You can't smell it and you can't see it.

Dangerous levels of carbon monoxide can build up from any fuel-burning appliance or equipment if it isn't working properly or if the CO that is produced isn't conducted safely to the outside. For example, if there isn't enough oxygen available to run your furnace, the rate of CO production can greatly increase. If you don't have a venting system to capture the CO, then heavy or light CO production can lead to a deadly build-up in your home.

According to the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 656 people died from unintentional non-fire gas poisonings in 2001, and most of those deaths involved carbon monoxide. NFPA strongly recommends that every home be protected by at least one CO detector, which can alert you to dangerous levels of CO in your home in time to prevent poisoning.

Early warning of hazardous CO levels is very important, but prevention comes first. Know what you need to do to ensure your home is safe from CO. Cooking and heating equipment and motor vehicles in attached garages make up a large percentage of the home CO problem, but NFPA says that portable electric generators, camps stoves and lanterns can also be culprits when not used properly.

The symptoms of CO poisoning – severe headache, dizziness, nausea – can seem like other illnesses such as the flu or food poisoning. Learn the signs: CO poisoning requires immediate medical attention.

You can prevent CO poisoning in your home with these key actions:

- Install at least one CO detector near the sleeping area: Test it every month and learn the sound of the alarm.
- Have heating equipment inspected each year to identify damage or malfunction. Make repairs as needed.
- Open the flue before using the fireplace.
- If you use a kerosene or gas heater, open a window slightly when the heater is in use.
- Use equipment properly: Never use an oven to heat a room and never bring BBQ grills indoors or into a garage or covered porch.
- Generators must be used outdoors in well-ventilated areas, never inside the home or garage.
- Always move vehicles out of the garage after starting the ignition, and then close the door.
- Don't allow snow or anything else to block the vents for your dryer, stove or heating equipment.

If your CO alarm signals, take it seriously. Quickly check to see if the battery power is low. If the alarm is steady, assume there is a CO leak and evacuate your home. Call 9-1-1 to report a suspected CO leak. Our personnel will let you know if it is safe to go back inside or if you need to arrange for a technician.

Carbon monoxide: You can't see it or smell it, but with the right actions you can stay safe from it.