

# December 2012

## Emergency Preparedness Pointers

### Winter And The Silent Killer

Cold weather is on the way as is the holiday season when there is something very special about a nice fire in the fireplace. The natural light and warmth create a great atmosphere but can also harbor a hidden danger. Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that is created when fuels, such as wood, coal, propane, natural gas, kerosene, gasoline or oil, burn incompletely. CO is sometimes referred to as “the silent killer.” Nationwide, it causes 500 fatalities and sends 20,000 people to the hospital each year. Stay safe by being aware of CO and how to detect it and protect against it.



### Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the dangers of CO exposure depend on many different things including the victim’s health and activity level. Pregnant women, infants and people with physical conditions such as heart disease, emphysema, asthma, or any other condition that limits the body’s ability to use oxygen, can be more severely affected by lower concentrations of CO than healthy adults. CO poisoning often goes misdiagnosed as the symptoms are flu-like and can include dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea and headaches. Extremely high concentrations of CO can cause death in minutes. CO travels quickly through the bloodstream by displacing oxygen on red blood cells. It is the depletion of oxygen in the body that causes harmful or even fatal effects.

### Sources of Carbon Monoxide In The Home

CO is formed by a lack of oxygen during the combustion process. Inadequate air-flow can cause this to occur in the following circumstances in the home:

- ☒ Motor vehicle left running in an attached garage.
- ☒ Corroded or improperly connected ventilation for a gas water heater or furnace.
- ☒ Gas or wood-burning fireplace (obstructed chimney or ventilation).
- ☒ Improperly installed kitchen range or vent.
- ☒ Portable gas or kerosene heaters.
- ☒ Gas or charcoal grills used inside or in an attached garage.

Gas generators can produce significant amounts of CO. If one is used during a power outage, it should be placed in a well ventilated area outdoors, away from all windows, doors or vent openings.

### Detection Is The First Step

Take the following steps to help prevent CO poisoning:

- ☑ Install CO alarms in a centralized location outside each sleeping area. Have them on every level of the home. For best results, interconnect all CO alarms throughout the building so that when one sounds, they all will sound.
- ☑ Read and follow the manufacturer’s instructions for placement and the proper mounting height.
- ☑ Research and choose an alarm that has been tested by a recognized testing laboratory.
- ☑ If the warning sound is given by the CO alarm, evacuate immediately to a fresh air location outdoors or next to an open window or door. Make sure everyone in the home has moved to a safe location. Call 911 for help from the fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel arrive.
- ☑ Make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear during and after snow storms.
- ☑ Test the alarm once a month. Replace batteries every six months or as needed if the low battery chirp is emitted by the alarm. If the alarm continues to chirp after the battery has been replaced, refer to the alarm manual for cleaning, maintenance or replacement instructions.
- ☑ Many CO alarms have a 5-6 year life expectancy and will require replacement with a whole new unit.

