

Carbon monoxide alarms can save lives

By Teri Mizuhara

Carbon monoxide, aka CO, is widely known as the “senseless killer” because you can’t see it, taste it, or smell it.

Annually, more than 400 people die and another 20,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning.

So what exactly is carbon monoxide? CO is the result of burning of a fuel such as wood burning fireplaces, gas furnace, gas water heaters, gas stoves and ovens, portable generators, barbecue grills, even your running car or truck. The fumes from the combustion contain CO gas and when a person breaths this gas in, they are subject to CO poisoning.

If you are exposed to high levels of CO, you may feel flu-like symptoms such as a headache, nausea, shortness of breath, dizziness or light headedness because the CO replaces the oxygen in the red blood cells, which in turn does not allow oxygen to reach vital organs.

A person’s red blood cells actually bond with CO easier than it bonds with oxygen. High levels of CO can kill a person in minutes and it is the No. 1 cause of unintentional death by poison in the United States.

If you suspect CO poisoning, get the person or people to fresh air immediately, then call 911. In some cases CO poisoning can cause permanent brain and heart damage.

As of July 1, 2011, carbon monoxide alarms in single family dwellings are required. Minimally, you should have CO alarms outside each sleeping area and on each level of your home including the basement. It also is a good idea to put a CO

alarm in each sleeping area. If they are plug-ins, test them once a month and if they have a battery backup, change that battery annually. Don't forget to vacuum the alarms often to keep them in proper working order.

Key points:

Never use a barbecue or outdoor space heater in your home or garage.

Do not leave your vehicle running in your garage, even for a few minutes.

Never heat your room or home with your kitchen oven.

Have your home heating system checked by a professional annually.

Have your wood burning stove or fireplace professionally cleaned annually.

If your CO alarm sounds, get everyone out of the house and call 911. If you cannot physically leave the house, move to an open doorway or open a window and stay there. Call 911. Do not close the window or door.

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