

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas. It is colourless, odourless and tasteless, and breathing CO can cause illness or death. CO is produced when a fuel, such as gasoline, natural gas, propane or wood, burns incompletely. Fuel-burning appliances, like furnaces and water heaters, can produce CO if they are not installed, used or maintained properly.

Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms are a valuable safety tool. There are now CO alarm requirements for new homes, but they are **recommended for all homes**.

The current building code (which came into force Sept. 2, 2007) requires CO alarms in new houses if there is a fuel-burning appliance (such as a furnace or water heater) or an attached garage. CO alarms are required in new condos/multi-family homes if the unit has a self-contained fuel-burning appliance or shares a wall or ceiling with a parking garage.

CO alarms must meet the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard. When you buy a CO alarm, make sure it is **certified by a recognized testing agency**, such as CSA or ULC, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation, use and maintenance. The alarms should be installed in bedrooms or within five metres of bedroom doors. They should also be in any service room that encloses a fuel-burning appliance (like a furnace room).

CO alarms are not a substitute for prevention. The following tips will also help you prevent a carbon monoxide tragedy from occurring in your home:

Maintaining fuel-burning appliances

You should have your fuel-burning appliances **inspected by a qualified heating professional** once a year. Between inspections, monitor your appliances and call a professional if:

- the flame on your natural gas furnace, water heater or stove is yellow. The flame should be a clear blue with occasional yellow tips (some natural gas fireplaces may be designed to have yellow flames); or
- you find cracks, holes, separations, rust, stains or carbon deposits on heating ducts or pipes.

Make sure your appliances get the **proper ventilation** they need:

- Your chimney should be inspected and cleaned every year. Between inspections, make sure leaves, snow, ice and other debris do not block the chimney.
- Each furnace, water heater, gas clothes dryer or other appliance must have a proper venting system.
- Temporary gas space heaters or wood-burning stoves and fireplaces must have a fresh-air supply. If there is no permanent duct, open a window when burning solid fuels or using temporary gas heaters.

Using appliances and machinery properly

- Once you start your car, move it outside the garage. **Never leave a vehicle running in an enclosed space.**
- Use only properly designed and vented fuel-burning space heaters to heat any enclosed space.
- Never use fuel-powered equipment such as barbecues, gas-powered lawnmowers, snow-blowers or chainsaws inside a confined space.

Know the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, and what to do

Symptoms of CO poisoning include headaches, nausea, drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, and loss of co-ordination or judgment. If you, another person, or a pet show symptoms of CO poisoning:

- leave the house immediately;
- call 911 or the local fire department from a neighbour's house. Tell emergency responders that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning; and
- do not go back into the house until the fire department says it's safe.

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For more information, please call toll-free 1-866-421-6929, or visit www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca.