

# Carbon Monoxide Fact Sheet

## *Facts about Carbon Monoxide*

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced as a result of incomplete burning of carbon-containing fuels.<sup>1</sup> Exposure to CO reduces the blood's ability to carry oxygen.<sup>2</sup>

Carbon monoxide exposures especially affect unborn babies, infants, and people with anemia or a history of heart or respiratory disease.<sup>3</sup>

Breathing low levels of CO can cause fatigue and increase chest pain in people with chronic heart disease. Breathing higher levels of carbon monoxide causes flu-like symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, and weakness in healthy people. Carbon monoxide also causes sleepiness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and disorientation. At very high levels, it causes loss of consciousness and death.<sup>4</sup>

Some 500 people die every year from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning. Thousands of others become ill or seek medical attention.<sup>5</sup> All too often people with CO poisoning ignore the warning symptoms, which can be fatal.<sup>6</sup>

Any fuel-burning appliance that is not adequately vented and maintained can be a potential source of CO, including:

- gas appliances (furnaces, ranges, ovens, water heaters, clothes dryers, etc.)
- fireplaces, wood and coal stoves, space heaters
- charcoal grills, automobile exhaust fumes, camp stoves, gas-powered lawn mowers, and power tools

Cigarette smoke can also contain high levels of CO, as well as 200 other known poisons.

Preventing carbon monoxide poisoning in the home is possible by taking some simple steps:

- Do not use unvented stoves, ovens or gas ranges to heat your home.
- Do not burn charcoal inside a home, cabin, recreational vehicle or camper.
- Do not operate gasoline-powered engines in confined areas such as garages or basements.
- Never leave your car or mower running in a garage, even if the door is open.
- Have the heating system, chimney and flue and any other combustion appliance inspected and cleaned by a qualified technician every year.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector with an audible alarm in your home and garage.
- If you are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseous and you suspect CO poisoning, see a doctor.

Carbon monoxide detectors should: meet Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. standards; have a long-term warranty; and be easily self-tested and reset to ensure proper functioning. For maximum effectiveness during sleeping hours, carbon monoxide detectors should be placed as close to sleeping areas as possible.