

Each year in America, carbon monoxide poisoning claims approximately 165 lives and sends another 10,000 people to hospital emergency rooms for treatment. Hamilton Fire District #3 would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself from deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Please read and follow the safety tips contained on this page.

### **Exposing an Invisible Killer: The Dangers of Carbon Monoxide**

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#### UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

##### **What is carbon monoxide?**

- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. At lower levels of exposure, CO causes mild effects that are often mistaken for the flu. These symptoms include headaches, dizziness, disorientation, nausea and fatigue. The effects of CO exposure can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and the concentration and length of exposure.

##### **Where does carbon monoxide come from?**

- CO gas can come from several sources: gas-fired appliances, charcoal grills, wood-burning furnaces or fireplaces and motor vehicles.

##### **Who is at risk?**

- Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning. Medical experts believe that unborn babies, infants, children, senior citizens and people with heart or lung problems are at even greater risk for CO poisoning.

##### **WHAT ACTIONS DO I TAKE IF MY CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM GOES OFF?**

What you need to do if your carbon monoxide alarm goes off depends on whether anyone is feeling ill or not.

**If no one is feeling ill:**

1. Silence the alarm.
2. Turn off all appliances and sources of combustion (i.e. furnace and fireplace).
3. Ventilate the house with fresh air by opening doors and windows.
4. Call a qualified professional to investigate the source of the possible CO buildup.

**If illness is a factor:**

1. Evacuate all occupants immediately.
2. Determine how many occupants are ill and determine their symptoms.
3. Call 9-1-1 and when relaying information to the dispatcher, include the number of people feeling ill.
4. Do not re-enter the home without the approval of a fire department representative.
5. Call a qualified professional to repair the source of the CO.

**PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY FROM CO POISONING**

- Install at least one UL (Underwriters Laboratories) listed carbon monoxide alarm with an audible warning signal near the sleeping areas and outside individual bedrooms. Carbon monoxide alarms measure levels of CO over time and are designed to sound an alarm before an average, healthy adult would experience symptoms. It is very possible that you may not be experiencing symptoms when you hear the alarm. This does not mean that CO is not present.

- Have a qualified professional check all fuel burning appliances, furnaces, venting and chimney systems at least once a year.
- Never use your range or oven to help heat your home and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or garage.
- Never keep a car running in a garage. Even if the garage doors are open, normal circulation will not provide enough fresh air to reliably prevent a dangerous buildup of CO.
- When purchasing an existing home, have a qualified technician evaluate the integrity of the heating and cooking systems, as well as the sealed spaces between the garage and house. The presence of a carbon monoxide alarm in your home can save your life in the event of

CO buildup.

### **Portable Generator Hazards**

Portable generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed, but they can be hazardous. The primary hazards to avoid when using them are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock or electrocution, and fire.

The West Orange Fire Department would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from improper use of portable generators.

#### **TO AVOID CARBON MONOXIDE HAZARDS:**

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- NEVER use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Never let children near generators.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Test CO alarms often and replace batteries when needed.

#### **TO AVOID ELECTRICAL HAZARDS:**

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy- like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- NEVER plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as a back-feed, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment. Or, your utility company may be able to install an appropriate transfer switch.

#### **TO AVOID FIRE HAZARDS:**

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool. Fuel spilled

on hot engine parts could ignite.

- Always store fuel outside of living areas in properly labeled, non-glass containers.
- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.

## *Carbon Monoxide*

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