



Manchester Fire Department Fire Marshal's Office

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Frequently Asked Questions About Carbon Monoxide

What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon Monoxide, known by its chemical name CO, is a poisonous gas. It is colorless, odorless and readily mixes in the air. Because you can't see, taste or smell CO, it can build up to dangerous levels in your home before you know it's there.

Why is carbon monoxide so dangerous?

CO is breathed in through the lungs and bonds with the hemoglobin in the blood. This interferes with your blood's oxygen-carrying capacity. Your body cannot deliver enough oxygen to your vital organs to keep them functioning properly. The presence of this poisonous compound in your blood can cause symptoms similar to the flu such as fatigue, headaches, dizziness and confusion. As toxic levels increase, symptoms can include nausea, vomiting or loss of consciousness. Exposure to extremely high levels of CO can cause brain damage or death.

Where does carbon monoxide come from?

Carbon monoxide is a by-product of incomplete combustion. It is produced to some extent whenever fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, coal, wood, gasoline or kerosene are burned. Excessive amounts of CO can be produced by defective, fuel-burning, appliances. These include gas stoves, furnaces, boilers, water heaters, gas grills, automobiles, lawnmowers and snow blowers. Any device that depends on burning a fuel for heat or energy can pose a threat if not operating properly.

What are some of the common sources of carbon monoxide?

Common causes of CO include a blocked or poorly ventilated fireplace chimney or furnace flue, damaged heating equipment and malfunctioning space heaters. Another common source is the operation of cars or other gasoline-powered equipment inside an unventilated garage.