



Louie  
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The Home  
Safety Guru

## Carbon Monoxide – The Colorless, Odorless Killer

With the heating season nearly upon us, homeowners need to ensure that they have Carbon Monoxide (CO) detectors in their home. According to the National Fire Protection Association ([www.NFPA.org](http://www.NFPA.org)), over 650 people died from unintentional non-fire gas poisonings in 2001, and most of those deaths involved carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is created when fuels do not burn completely. In homes, the biggest risks come from heating systems that are malfunctioning or do not properly vent outdoors, natural gas cooking equipment and gasoline powered vehicles or equipment.

Many people feel they don't have to worry about carbon monoxide poisoning in their home because they think they will smell a leak in time to get out safely. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

Here are the facts:

1. Dangerous levels of carbon monoxide can build up from any fuel-burning appliance or equipment if it isn't working properly or if the CO that is produced isn't properly vented to the outside. Also, when furnaces have cracked housings that let the circulated air for the home to mix with the combusted air from the furnace, this allows CO to get into living areas of home.
2. Early warning of hazardous CO levels is very important, but prevention comes first. Know what you need to do to ensure your home is safe from CO. Cooking, heating equipment and motor vehicles in attached garages make up a large percentage of the home CO problem, but NFPA says that portable electric generators, camp stoves and lanterns can also be a problem when not used properly.
3. The symptoms of CO poisoning – severe headache, dizziness, nausea – can seem like other illnesses, such as the flu or food poisoning. Learn the signs - CO poisoning requires immediate medical attention.

You can prevent CO poisoning in your home with these key actions:

- ◆ Install at least one CO detector near the sleeping area. Test it every month and learn the sound of the alarm. The best types are ones that are AC powered with a battery backup (in case the circuit breaker get tripped without your knowledge) and have a digital reading of the CO levels. If the home is large, consider having others in areas where you can hear the alarm, like in basements, family rooms, etc. If you have a security system, consider having your monitoring company install at least one.
- ◆ CO detectors are only good for 5-7 years, depending on manufacturer and when it was produced. If yours is older than that or you are not certain, get a new one.
- ◆ Have heating equipment and hot water heater inspected and serviced by a reputable furnace service technician annually to identify damage or malfunction. Make any repairs as needed.
- ◆ Always check that the fireplace flue is open before using any fireplace.
- ◆ If you use a kerosene or gas heater, open a window when the heater is in use and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Better yet, avoid using these in a home.
- ◆ Use equipment properly. Never use an oven to heat a room and never bring BBQ grills indoors or into a garage or covered porch.
- ◆ Generators must be used outdoors in well-ventilated areas, never inside the home or garage.
- ◆ Always move vehicles out of the garage after starting the ignition and then close the overhead door.



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- ◆ Don't allow snow or anything else to block the vents for your dryer, furnace, stove or heating equipment.
- ◆ If your CO alarm signals, take it seriously. Quickly check to see if the battery power is low. If the alarm is steady, assume there is a CO leak and evacuate your home. Call 911 to report a suspected CO leak. They will let you know if it is safe to go back inside or if you need to arrange for any repairs.

Carbon monoxide: You can't see it or smell it and it can kill, but with the right actions you and your family can be safer in your home.

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Louie Delaware, **The Home Safety Guru™**, president and founder of US Safety Pros, LLC is a Certified Child & Home Safety Professional in all aspects of home safety, from childproofing to home safety, radon testing & mitigation along with fire, carbon monoxide and barrier free construction. US Safety Pros has helped safeguard over 700 homes. For more information about Louie Delaware, go to his web site, [www.HomeSafetyGuru.com](http://www.HomeSafetyGuru.com).

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