

Your Health Matters

THE INVISIBLE KILLER

What is odorless, colorless, tasteless, and can kill within minutes? The answer is: Carbon monoxide (CO). You can't see it; you can't smell it; but it could be killing your family. Is your home safe?

Carbon monoxide is very dangerous. It can cause sudden illness and death. CO is found in combustion fumes, like those made by heating systems, lanterns, gas ranges, stoves and vehicles. When these things are operated in a place without a good flow of fresh air, carbon monoxide fumes can build up, causing a headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion.

It can be hard to tell if you are being poisoned by CO. You can't see it or smell it. That's why it's called the invisible killer. You may just think you have the flu, or you may go to sleep without realizing you are in danger.

Why do I need a carbon monoxide detector? More than 400 Americans are killed by CO poisoning every year. It can affect anyone, but some people are more likely to get sick from CO. Infants, senior adults, and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or breathing problems are at highest risk.

You can take important steps to protect your family from this silent killer.

- Install a battery-powered CO detector to warn you with an alarm if the CO levels get high.
- Have your chimney and your heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Never use a generator, camp stove, or portable flameless chemical heater in your home, or burn charcoal inside your house.
- Do not use your gas oven or stove-top to heat your home.
- Make sure your gas appliances are vented properly. If you smell an odor or need to patch a vent pipe, call a professional.
- Never run your car in the garage, even with the garage door open. Pull the vehicle outside of the garage to let it warm up. Have your vehicle's exhaust system checked each year. Be sure to roll down the windows if you have the back hatch of your vehicle open while it is running. Otherwise CO can build up inside the vehicle.

If you think you are experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning, get outside to fresh air immediately. You could fall unconscious and die if you stay inside. Call the fire department from a neighbor's home or from your cell phone. Also, seek medical care from your health



care provider immediately, and tell him you suspect CO poisoning. If your health care provider confirms CO poisoning, be sure to find the source of the CO and fix it before you return home.

The Health Department has a limited number of FREE carbon monoxide detectors for distribution. These are provided by Quad County Safe Kids Coalition. To qualify you must be a resident of Montgomery County, have children less than 19 years old living in your household and heat with wood and gas. You must also meet the income guidelines. Please call Kathie Hoette, RN to see if you qualify and for more information.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Harman".

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