

# Office of State Fire Marshal



## Carbon Monoxide Alarm Frequently Asked Questions

### What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

- It is an invisible, odorless, poisonous gas created when fuels do not burn completely

### Where does carbon monoxide come from?

- Heaters, fireplaces, furnaces, appliances and cooking sources using coal, wood, petroleum products, and other fuels
- Products and equipment powered by an internal combustion engine, such as automobiles, portable generators, lawn mowers, and power washers
- Operating automobiles and gas powered equipment inside an attached garage increases the risk of introducing of carbon monoxide into a living space



### Why is carbon monoxide harmful?

- It displaces oxygen in the blood and deprives the heart, brain, and other vital organs of oxygen
- Especially at risk are: Unborn babies, infants, older adults, people who smoke and people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or respiratory problems

### What are symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Initial symptoms are similar to the flu, but without the fever: headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, bright red skin
- Severe symptoms include: mental confusion, vomiting, loss of muscular coordination, loss of consciousness, death

### What types of carbon monoxide alarms are available?

- Carbon monoxide only alarms: Activated by the presents of carbon monoxide
- May be battery-operated, plug-in (with a battery back-up), or hard-wired with a battery back-up (Long life – 10 year battery). Most carbon monoxide alarms have a five year life span
- Combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarms: Activated by smoke or carbon monoxide
- Ionization smoke/carbon monoxide alarms: Activated by smoke or carbon monoxide
- Photoelectric smoke/carbon monoxide alarm: Activated by smoke or carbon monoxide
- Photoelectric smoke/carbon monoxide with voice alarm: Activated by smoke or carbon monoxide. An audible voice tone speaks the type and location of danger in your home, when programmed
- Explosive gas & carbon monoxide alarm: Activated by carbon monoxide, propane or natural/methane gas

## Who does what, when?

- Oregon law requires carbon monoxide alarms to be installed following specific House Bill 3450 implementation dates. **As of April 1, 2011:**
  - Landlords must provide properly functioning carbon monoxide alarms for all rental dwelling units with or within a structure containing a carbon monoxide source
  - Home sellers of one-and two family dwellings, manufactured dwellings, or multifamily housing units containing a carbon monoxide source must have one or more properly functioning carbon monoxide alarms before conveying fee title or transferring possession of a dwelling
  - The carbon monoxide alarm requirements for new construction, reconstruction, alteration and repair are applicable regardless of the presence of a carbon monoxide source

## Where do I install carbon monoxide alarms?

- On each level of your home with sleeping areas, in each bedroom or within 15 feet outside of each sleeping area. However, ductwork from sources often goes directly to bedrooms, bypassing hallways outside of sleeping areas
- Install alarms according to the manufacturer's instructions
- Improper installation locations can affect the sensitive electronic components. Do not install a CO alarm in:
  - Garages and kitchens; Extremely dusty, dirty, humid, or greasy areas
  - In direct sunlight or areas prone to temperature extremes
  - In electrical outlets covered by curtains or other obstructions
  - In turbulent air such as near ceiling fans, heat vents, air conditioners, fresh air returns, or open windows. Blowing air may prevent carbon monoxide from reaching the sensors
  - Directly above or beside fuel-burning appliances, as appliances may emit a trace amount of carbon monoxide only upon start-up
  - Within 15 feet of heating and cooking appliances
  - In or near very humid areas such as bathrooms

## How often do I replace my carbon monoxide alarm?

- Most carbon monoxide alarms have a five year limited warranty
- Manufacturers recommend replacing alarms five years from date of production

## How do I keep my carbon monoxide alarm working?

- Test alarms monthly
- Use canned air or vacuum alarms regularly to remove dust and cobwebs
- Never disconnect or remove alarm batteries for other use
- Replace carbon monoxide alarms every five years

## What should I do when the carbon monoxide alarm sounds?

- **Don't ignore the alarm!** Its intention is to warn household members before they experience symptoms. Silence the alarm, Move everyone outside to fresh air and call for help from a fresh air location
- If anyone is experiencing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, call 9-1-1