

Carbon Monoxide-A real and present danger

As the last vestiges of fall blow away and the first snowflakes of winter settle onto the once vibrant lawns and gardens, thoughts of living in a place where cold weather is just a rumor fight to create space in that limited area know as my mind. Whether you enjoy winter or not, the reality is that all of us must live in a heated house to have some degree of comfort. Most heating appliances require the burning of wood or gas to generate heat. This creates opportunities for carbon monoxide, which is a by-product of incomplete combustion. Poisoning from carbon monoxide-even at low levels-can create serious health problems. The next few months I will be detailing the causes, effects, warning signs, and solutions for this all too common hazard.

There is no “safe” level of carbon monoxide. It is measured in PPM (parts per million). It has been suggested by various organizations that “normal” levels are below 50 ppm. Other reports consider levels from 9-35ppm to be OK. According to Carbon Monoxide expert Bob Dwyer, CO levels inside a home should be no higher than levels outside the home. “Spikes” in the levels should be anticipated from cigarette smoke, candles, wood burning fireplaces, etc. Long term exposure to relatively low levels of CO can lead to chronic fatigue syndrome, heart disease, and many other problems that are usually misdiagnosed. For a sampling of levels of high exposure and what you may experience, refer to the following chart:

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>CO ppm</u>
Slight headaches, dizziness after 2-3 hours	200
Frontal headaches after 1-2 hours; life threatening in 3 hours	400
Dizziness, nausea and convulsions within 45 minutes	800
Unconscious within 2 hours; death with 2-3 hours	
Headaches, dizziness, and nausea within 20 min; death in 1 hour	1600
Headaches, dizziness, and nausea within 5-10 min; death in 30 min.	3200
Headaches, dizziness, and nausea within 1-2 min; death 10-15 min	6400

If you experience any of the symptoms in the above chart, you should start by leaving the room or area and have it tested for CO. If any CO is recorded, you should then determine the cause and have it rectified.

Automobile exhaust is the number one cause of high levels of CO. Warming up your car in the garage is never a good idea-even for a couple of minutes. This is true even if the garage door is open. CO seeps into the living spaces and create short and long term problems. The driver may experience headaches from this overexposure and attribute it to something else.

Tune in next month for how to ensure that your house is not trying to kill you! (With CO emissions.)