

Carbon Monoxide Safety Facts

SUMMARY

Carbon monoxide (CO) causes upward of 400 deaths and results in the hospitalization of more than 4,000 people each year in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Many of those falling ill don't know they have CO poisoning because it is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas. With proper inspection and housekeeping, Scouts and community members alike can prevent CO poisoning.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Causes of CO Release and Exposure

CO is a byproduct of many of your day-to-day activities. It is found in the fumes from gas stoves and lanterns, fireplaces, and the burning of charcoal, as well as from motor vehicles such as cars and boats. Additionally, CO poisoning most often occurs when the fumes are released within the confines of a small or closed-off room.

Sources of CO

Car left running
Portable generators
Portable kerosene or gas heaters/lanterns
Loose or broken ventilation pipes
Improperly installed kitchen range or vent
Operating a grill indoors or in garage
Gas or wood-burning fireplace

(Possible) Symptoms of Poisoning

Headache
Weakness
Dizziness
Nausea
Confusion
Disorientation
Sleepiness

In More Severe Cases

Fluid in the lungs (pulmonary edema)
Neurological disorders

Prevention and What to Do in an Emergency

- Make sure you have a properly installed CO detector in your home.
- Do not use flames or flame-producing equipment within a closed environment such as a small room, building, or tent.
- Check the seals of containers with flammable contents to ensure proper storage and prevent leakage.
- Do not burn fuels such as charcoal, propane, or other gases indoors.
- Always swim away from the engine side of any floating motor vehicle.
- Be sure to keep your vehicle inspections up to date.

If you suspect you are suffering from CO poisoning, immediately open any doors and windows to get fresh air, and contact your health-care facility or call 911.