

Carbon Monoxide Hazards



STEWARD OBSERVATORY, JULY 2008

Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas that you can't see, smell or taste. This invisible hazard is a potential killer, and even if it doesn't kill it can cause serious damage when breathed into the body. It does this by displacing the oxygen in the blood and effectively starving the body's vital organs of oxygen, thus destroying cells.

Most sufferers think they simply have the flu when often times it is CO poisoning

Symptoms of CO over exposure:

Headache, nausea, weakness, dizziness, chest pain, hallucinations, changes in personality, and loss of consciousness.

Long term effects:

Memory, brain function, behavior, cognition as well as permanent damage to major organs within the body, such as the heart.

People at Risk for CO exposure:

Welders, mechanics, engine operators, forklift operators, and firefighters

As well as...

Elderly people, young children, pregnant mothers, heart or lung disease sufferers, those residing in high altitudes, smokers and unborn babies.

People using gasoline-powered tools such as high pressure washers, concrete cutting saws, power trowels, floor buffers, welders, pumps, compressors, diesel/gas vehicles and generators in buildings or semi-enclosed/confined spaces ARE ALL AT RISK FOR CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING!

How can employers help prevent CO poisoning?

- Install an effective ventilation system that will remove CO from work areas.
- Switch from gasoline-powered equipment to equipment powered by electricity, batteries, or compressed air if it can be used safely.
- Prohibit the use of gasoline-powered engines or tools in poorly ventilated areas.
- Educate workers about the sources and conditions that may result in CO poisoning.
- Must test for oxygen sufficiency before entering confined space.



When you suspect CO poisoning:

- Move the victim immediately to fresh air in an open area
- Call 911 or another local emergency number for medical assistance
- Administer CPR if the victim has stopped breathing

Wherever there is a risk (e.g. confined spaces) change gas-powered equipment for an electric alternative. Other equipment that produces CO include kerosene space heaters and propane powered floor polishers.

Remember, you can not see, smell, or taste carbon monoxide, so your only defense against this potential killer is prevention.