



Palmetto Poison Center

For Immediate Release:

January 12, 2009

Contact: William Richardson, MD
Medical Director
(803) 777-9006 (office)
whrichardson@sc.rr.com

Jill Michels, PharmD
Managing Director
(803) 777-7909 (work)
Michels@cop.sc.edu

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless toxic gas. It is produced when any fuel such as natural gas, propane, gasoline, kerosene, wood, or charcoal is burned. Carbon monoxide can build up in enclosed and semi-enclosed spaces, which can be deadly.

Some potential sources that produce carbon monoxide are: water heaters, stoves, ovens, kerosene heaters, grills, wood and gas fireplaces, portable generators, and automobile engines. Since you cannot see it, taste it, or smell it, it can kill quickly or slowly. Carbon monoxide can also cause permanent damage to the brain and other parts of your nervous system. People of all ages can be affected, but infants and children are the most vulnerable.

Symptoms

The symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to the flu or food poisoning. They can include:

- Fatigue/sleepiness
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Headache
- Irregular breathing
- Confusion or disorientation

Prevention

- Never use fuel-burning equipment (grills, stoves, kerosene heaters, lanterns, generators, lawn mowers, etc.) in enclosed/poorly ventilated spaces (tent, garage, basement, boat cabin, etc.).
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for safe operation of fuel-burning appliances.
- A qualified technician should check gas-burning appliances (including hot water heaters and gas dryers) annually.

- Install a UL-approved CO alarm on every level of the home containing sleeping quarters. *An alarm is not a substitute for proper use and maintenance of fuel-burning appliances.*
- Post the poison hotline number (1-800-222-1222) near phones. Call immediately for possible poisonings, or for poison prevention advice. It is better to ask questions now, than to be sorry later.

If The CO Alarm Goes Off:

- Check to see if any member of the household is experiencing symptoms.
- If they are, leave the affected area immediately and get fresh air.
- If no one is feeling symptoms, open windows/doors and turn off potential sources of CO.
- Have a qualified technician inspect fuel-burning appliances to identify and correct source of leak.

Call the Palmetto Poison Center for help, 1-800-222-1222. We are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, free of charge.