

New law requires carbon monoxide detectors in dwellings

By Anne-Marie Coy on 14 February, 2011

On February 1, 2011, a new law requiring carbon monoxide (CO) alarms to be installed in all one- and two-family dwellings takes effect. Newly constructed homes will require CO detectors that are directly wired to the home's electrical service and existing homes may use battery-powered, stand-alone detectors. State law currently includes a similar requirement for multi-family dwellings.



WARNING! Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. A new Wisconsin Law aims to protect residents from this risk by requiring a CO detector installed in all residential dwellings.

Detectors work like smoke alarms to alert you to dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide. Battery powered portable CO detectors are also available for use away from home. Health officials recommend installing CO detectors on every level of your home and near sleeping areas.

CO is a colorless, odorless gas that can be emitted from poorly functioning or unvented furnaces or other gas powered home appliances. Outdoor appliances such as portable generators, heaters, and stoves, can also create dangerous levels of CO in cabins, campers, tents, and hunting and fishing shacks.

Symptoms of CO poisoning are flu-like and include headache, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea and mental confusion. High levels of exposure may lead to more serious health problems, including loss of consciousness and death.

What should you do if you think you are experiencing symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning?

- **DO GET FRESH AIR IMMEDIATELY.** Open doors and windows, turn off combustion appliances and leave the house
- **DO GO TO AN EMERGENCY ROOM** and tell the physician you suspect CO poisoning. If poisoning has occurred it can often be diagnosed by a blood test done soon after exposure.
- Be prepared to answer the following questions for the doctor:
 - Do your symptoms occur only in the house?
 - Do they disappear or decrease when you leave home and reappear when you return?
 - Are you using any fuel-burning appliances in the home?
 - Has anyone inspected your appliances lately? Are you certain they are working properly?

For more information on the CO detector requirements: commerce.wi.gov/SB/docs/SB-CodeDev2128HOAdoptDrft1110.pdf

Winter weather safety tips and information on carbon monoxide from the EPA and Department of Health Services:

- www.epa.gov/iaq/pdfs/co_factsheet_en.pdf
- dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/InjuryPrevention/WeatherRelated/WinterCold/index.htm
- dhs.wisconsin.gov/eh/ChemFS/fs/CO.htm

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