



Department of Health

1 Geneva Road, Brewster, New York 10509
(845) 808-1390



MaryEllen Odell
County Executive

Michael J. Nesheiwat, M.D.
Interim Commissioner of Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: January 24, 2017

Contact: Barbara Ilardi, Public Information Officer, (845) 808-1390

Health Department Issues Winter Reminder about Carbon Monoxide Safety

BREWSTER, NY —During the winter months, people seal their windows and turn up their heat. As a result, carbon monoxide (CO) poisonings rise. Each year approximately 500 Americans are killed, and thousands more are injured, due to CO poisoning. In fact, this odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas—sometimes called the “silent killer”—is the leading cause of poison-related deaths in the U.S. Most problems occur in homes and garages as a result of poor ventilation near a fuel-burning device such as a furnace or automobile.

“CO poisoning is completely preventable,” says Interim Health Commissioner Michael Nesheiwat, MD. “With the proper precautions, these injuries like many others can be avoided. Everyone should have a carbon monoxide detector installed in their home and the batteries should be checked periodically. We advise residents to change them in the fall when we set back the clocks. If you haven’t done it yet, now is the time.”

In addition to furnaces and automobiles, CO can come from broken or incorrectly used stoves, portable generators or space heaters, gas ranges, charcoal, firewood and other products. After snow storms or other events with power outages, the use of generators and portable heaters goes up, along with the potential for danger. However, faulty home heating systems, both gas- and oil-burning furnaces, are more often the cause. In these cases, nearly half of the victims are asleep at the time of poisoning.

CO detectors are an inexpensive solution to a potentially deadly problem. They are available at home and hardware stores everywhere and not difficult to install. CO detectors come with manufacturers’ instructions about placement, usage and maintenance. For maximum protection, installing alarms on each level of your home is advised, with at least one near the sleeping area. Even residents with “all electric homes,” often use CO-emitting devices such as generators, automobiles, gas dryers and fireplaces. CO alarms should be tested monthly and batteries typically should be changed twice a year.

The number-two prevention tip is to have your furnace serviced regularly by a professional. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends annual inspections and local gas and utility companies usually have similar recommendations.

Other important prevention tips include:

1. Never use a gas range or oven for warmth.
2. Never start up or run a snow blower, or other gasoline-powered engine (snow blowers, mowers, weed trimmers, chain saws, etc.) in an enclosed space.
3. Never use a fireplace or stove unless it is properly installed and vented.
4. Never operate an unvented fuel burning appliance, such as a gas or kerosene heater, in any room where people are sleeping.
5. Never run generators indoors, including in garages, basements or porches. Generators should be placed at least 20 feet from a home. (This distance is usually adequate to prevent CO from entering a home.)
6. Never use a charcoal or barbeque grill inside your home or garage.
7. Never run a car or motorcycle inside a garage attached to a house or in a detached garage with the garage door shut. Open the door to remove CO and other toxic exhaust gases.

Initial symptoms of CO poisoning are flu-like and may include dizziness, shortness of breath, sleepiness, weakness, nausea and headache. If the early signs are ignored, a person could lose consciousness and be unable to escape danger. If you suspect CO is leaking in your home or building, go outside immediately and call 911 from outside.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

For further information, please visit:

New York State Department of Health: http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency/weather/carbon_monoxide/

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/co/>