

County Urges Residents to Check CO Detectors

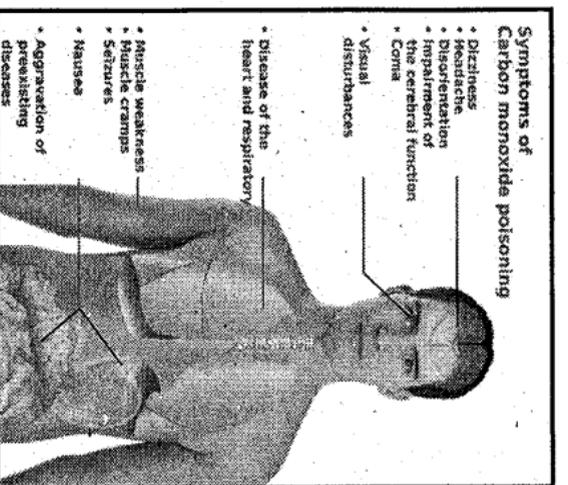
Simple steps can stop a silent killer

Odorless and colorless, carbon monoxide (CO) is a dangerous as it is hard to detect. And with winter weather causing people to seal windows and run their heaters more, CO poisonings rise during the winter months. 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,” Health Commissioner Michael Neshewat, MD said. “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. 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



Public domain No caption or credit needed

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.

Keep Combustion Engine Exhaust Out

While the Health Department advises against using a range or oven for warmth and says “never operate an unvented fuel burning appliance, such as a gas or kerosene heater, in any room where people are sleeping,” not all hazards are indoors. Exhaust from generators, snow blowers, idling cars and trucks can pose a threat if it’s allowed to leak indoors. “Never start up or run a snow blower, or other gasoline-powered engine in an enclosed space. 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.”

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.

Learn more at putnamcountyny.com/health.