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Americans spend approximately 90 percent of their time indoors, where hazardous air pollutants can exist at higher levels than outdoors. Children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with lung disease are particularly at high risk for adverse health effects caused by indoor air pollution, including carbon monoxide (CO). CO is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced as a result of incomplete burning of carbon-containing fuels. Exposure to CO reduces the blood's ability to carry oxygen.

Carbon monoxide exposures especially affect unborn babies, infants, and people with anemia or a history of heart or respiratory disease.

Breathing low levels of CO can cause fatigue and increase chest pain in people with chronic heart disease. Breathing higher levels of carbon monoxide causes flu-like symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, and weakness in healthy people. Carbon monoxide also causes sleepiness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and disorientation. At very high levels, it causes loss of consciousness and death.

Nearly 300 people die every year from carbon monoxide exposure related to residential combustion appliances, and thousands of others become ill or seek medical attention.

Any fuel-burning appliance that is not adequately vented and maintained can be a potential source of CO, including:

- gas appliances (furnaces, ranges, ovens, water heaters, clothes dryers, etc.)
- fireplaces, wood and coal stoves, space heaters
- charcoal grills, automobile exhaust fumes, camp stoves, gas-powered lawn mowers, and power tools

Cigarette smoke can also contain high levels of CO, as well as 200 other known poisons.

Preventing carbon monoxide poisoning from exposure to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide in the home is possible by taking some simple steps:

- Make sure appliances are installed and working according to manufacturers' instructions and local building codes.
- Have only a qualified technician install or convert fuel-burning equipment from one type to another.
- Have the heating system, chimney and flue inspected and cleaned by a qualified technician every year.
- Do not use ovens and gas ranges to heat your home.

- Do not burn charcoal inside a home, cabin, recreational vehicle or camper.
- Do not operate gasoline-powered engines in confined areas such as garages or basements.
- Never leave your car or mower running in a closed garage.
- Make sure your furnace has adequate intake of outside air.
- Choose vented appliances whenever possible.
- Use kerosene space heaters and unvented gas heaters only in well ventilated rooms.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector with an audible alarm in your home and garage.

Carbon monoxide detectors should: meet Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. standards; have a long-term warranty; and be easily self-tested and reset to ensure proper functioning. For maximum effectiveness during sleeping hours, carbon monoxide detectors should be placed as close to sleeping areas as possible.