

Safety Innovations

Carbon Monoxide: The Invisible Menace

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in U.S. Reinforces Need for Home Detection

(NAPSA)—As Americans tighten up their houses and use more appliances during the colder months, historically a rash of carbon monoxide (CO) incidents occur. Unfortunately most homeowners are oblivious to the life-threatening dangers posed by carbon monoxide. In fact, the National Carbon Monoxide Study by Kidde, a leading home safety products manufacturer, found that nearly one-quarter of families with small children are unaware of the symptoms of carbon monoxide (August, 2002). This news is particularly disturbing since small children are one of the highest-risk groups for mental and physical damage due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide (CO), known as “The Silent Killer,” is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control. In addition, the American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that 20,000 health-related injuries and 40,000 emergency visits take place each year. Shockingly, while 94 percent of homes have at least one smoke alarm, only 26 percent of homes have a carbon monoxide alarm, according to industry sources.

Carbon monoxide is insidious because it is odorless, tasteless and colorless—and can strike at any time. A carbon monoxide alarm is the first line of defense a family has to protect itself from this deadly gas. “Carbon monoxide can kill you in the middle of the night with no warning,” said Thomas Greiner, associate professor, agricultural and biosystems engineering, Iowa State University. “Every home needs a working carbon monoxide alarm.”

HOW CO STRIKES

Any appliance that burns a fossil fuel (gas oven, kerosene space heater, wood-burning fireplace)



emits carbon monoxide, as a natural by-product of combustion. If the appliance malfunctions, however, a furnace develops a cracked heat exchanger or chimneys and flues become blocked, toxic amounts of CO can quickly invade the living space. While it is good practice to have all appliances checked prior to each heating season, an inspection doesn't guarantee against the presence of carbon monoxide. Therefore, it is important for homeowners to be aware of possible sources of contamination. Steve Gladstone, vice president of the American Society of Home Inspectors warns that carbon monoxide leaks are not an “if but when,” because home appliances, heating and chimney flue systems are not designed to last forever. “At some point, a malfunction is likely,” Gladstone said.

THE “GREAT IMITATOR”

Carbon monoxide poisoning is also known as the “Great Imitator,” because its symptoms are similar to the flu. Fatigue, headache, nausea, dizziness, tightness in the chest and diarrhea are typical complaints. As mentioned previously, some groups of individuals are at a higher risk for CO poisoning than

others, such as pregnant women, unborn children, young children and the elderly. When polled, 25 percent of adults (both men and women) didn't know that CO symptoms mimic the flu and 20 percent of women weren't aware there is an increased chance of birth defects if a fetus is exposed to carbon monoxide. The mental and physical damage caused by carbon monoxide poisoning varies based upon the level of exposure and length of time in the poisoned environment.

TAKE ACTION TODAY

According to industry estimates, approximately 74 million households remain unprotected from carbon monoxide exposure. Due to the invisible nature of this airborne poison, safety experts agree that the consumer's first line of defense is to install carbon monoxide alarms on each level of the home.

New technology, developed by Kidde, provides a peak level memory feature that will record the highest level of CO the alarm has been exposed to after it activates. This information is especially important to first responders who may arrive on the scene only to find that the building has been ventilated and they are then unable to quickly determine the seriousness of the exposure.

The Kidde Nighthawk™ Digital Display alarm is designed to show a readout of carbon monoxide levels in parts-per-million, with a reading that is updated every 15 seconds. The unit is available at home center, mass merchants and hardware retailers for about \$45.

For more information about Kidde Safety products, call toll-free 1-800-880-6788 or visit www.kiddeus.com.