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Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

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Supervising Safety Newsletter

Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by inhaling combustion fumes. When too much carbon monoxide is in the air, the body replaces the oxygen in red blood cells with carbon monoxide. This prevents oxygen from reaching different tissues and organs. Carbon monoxide poisoning can be subtle, but it is a life-threatening medical emergency that can cause irreversible brain damage or death. The month of January is known as being the deadliest month for carbon monoxide poisoning, both at work and at home.

There are multiple tools that we use every day that could be a source of exposure. These include portable generators, gas-powered equipment, welders, gas-powered pumps, and heaters. Many people use a heater to stay warm while working in cold weather conditions, but have we stopped to make sure we are using them safely? We should start by asking ourselves a few questions. Is the appliance designed to be used indoors? Will it be used in a closed or partially closed space? Any appliance that produces carbon monoxide should be well-ventilated, allowing harmful gases to dissipate.

Some of the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Headache
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Confusion
- Blurred vision
- Loss of consciousness (sign of severe exposure)

Depending on the degree and length of exposure, carbon monoxide poisoning can cause permanent brain damage, life-threatening cardiac complications and heart damage, fetal death or miscarriage, and death. People at the greatest risk include children, older adults, and unborn babies. People with chronic heart disease, a history of anemia,

and breathing problems are also at an increased risk of severe complications from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Install Carbon Monoxide detectors. They should be located in the hallways near sleeping quarters. Remember to change out the batteries every six months, along with your smoke detector batteries. Replace your CO and smoke detectors every seven to ten years.

Open the garage door when starting your car. Never leave your car running in the garage. Be particularly cautious if you have an attached garage. Leaving your car running in a space attached to the rest of the house is never safe, even with the garage door open.

Use gas appliances as recommended. Never use a gas stove or oven to heat your home. Only use portable gas camp stoves when outside. Use fuel-burning space heaters when someone is awake to monitor them and doors or windows are open to provide fresh air. Don't run a generator in an enclosed space, such as the basement or garage.

If you have a fireplace, keep it in good repair. Clean your fireplace chimney and flue every year.

Keep vents and chimneys unblocked during remodeling. Check that they aren't covered by tarps or debris.

Make repairs before returning to the site of an incident. If carbon monoxide poisoning has occurred in your home, it's critical to find and repair the source of the carbon monoxide before returning home. The local fire department or utility company may be able to help.

Use caution when working with solvents in a closed area. Methylene chloride, a solvent commonly found in paint and varnish removers, can break down (metabolize) into carbon monoxide when inhaled.

Remember to watch out for one another this winter season and avoid hazardous situations by following safe work practices and avoiding exposure.

Carbon Monoxide

