



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
MS AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY
EXPERIMENT STATION

MAFES DAWG TRACKS

What is Carbon Monoxide (CO)?

CO is an odorless, colorless gas that can kill you. It is found in combustion exhaust fumes from gas, wood, propane or other fuel. Any time you burn fuel in vehicles, equipment, small engines, stoves, lanterns, grills, fireplaces, gas ranges, or furnaces there is a risk. CO can build up where there is poor ventilation or indoors areas. CO will absorb in your blood stream, replacing the oxygen in red blood cells, causing tissue damage and poison to both people and animals who breathe it.

Who is at risk from CO poisoning?

Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning. Infants, the elderly, people with chronic heart disease, anemia, or breathing problems are more likely to get sick from CO. Each year, more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. CO symptoms are often described as “flu-like.” Seek medical attention immediately if CO poisoning is suspected. Receiving oxygen treatment quickly is essential to prevent long-term effects.

What about diesel vs gasoline engines?

Diesel engines are able to process fuel more efficiently, therefore releasing much lower levels of CO than gasoline engines. If a diesel engine is run perfectly within the manufacturer’s specifications for fuel efficiency, it produces only a small amount of carbon monoxide, usually not enough to be quickly lethal. However, most engines do not always run at exact manufacturer

specifications. Even a small exhaust leak, change in tune, or if the engine is not running perfectly because of wear, it can result in dangerous CO levels. So, while better than gas burner engines, there is still a risk of CO poisoning with diesel engines.

How can I prevent CO poisoning?

- Install a battery-operated or battery back-up CO detector in your home and recreational vehicles. Place your detector where it will wake you up if it alarms, such as outside your bedroom.
- Have your fuel burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year. Have your chimney checked or cleaned every year. Chimneys can be blocked by debris causing CO to build up inside your home.
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters indoors.
- Make sure your gas appliances are vented properly.
- Never use a gas range or oven for heating. Using a gas range or oven for heating can cause a buildup of CO inside your home or camper.
- Never burn charcoal or use a portable gas camp stove indoors.
- Only use generators outside, more than 20 feet away from your home, doors, and windows.
- A car or SUV with a tailgate. If is open or not well sealed, can suck CO from the exhaust into the passenger area.
- Don’t fall asleep or sit for a long time in an idling vehicle in an enclosed space.

For more info contact:

Leslie Woolington

MAFES/MSU-ES Risk Mgmt.

LHW4@msstate.edu

662.325.3204

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/co/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/carbon-monoxide-poisoning>

<https://www.overdriveonline.com/in-cab-diesel-fumes-separating-carbon-monoxide-fact-from-fiction/>