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Detector Best Protection from Deadly Carbon Monoxide

If you think you'll know if you have a carbon monoxide leak in your home because you'll smell it – think again. This deadly gas is odorless, colorless and tasteless, and it kills about 250 people each year in the United States.

Dangerous levels of CO can build up from any fuel-burning appliance or equipment if it isn't working properly. The Oak Park Fire Department recommends the following steps to ensure your home is safe from carbon monoxide:

- Have a qualified technician inspect your fuel-burning appliances, such as oil and gas furnaces, hot water heaters and stoves at least once a year.
- Install an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) Listed carbon monoxide detector outside sleeping areas. If the detector is wired directly into a home's electrical system, test it monthly. If the unit is battery operated, test it weekly and replace the battery at least once a year.
- Do not install CO detectors directly above or beside fuel-burning appliances, as they may emit small amounts of carbon monoxide upon start up. A detector should not be placed within 15 feet of heating or cooking appliances.
- CO detector manufacturers suggest mounting the detector on the ceiling out of the way of potential interference. CO also is roughly the same weight as air coming from combustion appliances and will rise with the warmer air.
- Know how to respond to an activated CO detector alarm. Turn off the appliance and other sources of combustion at once. Immediately get fresh air into the premises by opening doors and windows. Do a head count to be sure all persons are accounted for. Do not re-enter the premises until it has been aired out and the problem corrected.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning include flu-like symptoms such as headaches, tightness of the chest, dizziness, fatigue, confusion and breathing difficulties. Because CO poisoning often causes a victim's blood pressure to rise, the skin may take on a pink or red color.

Carbon monoxide detectors are not substitutes for smoke detectors, fire officials caution, so both devices are essential.

For more information or to have the Oak Park Fire Department to test your home's carbon monoxide level, call 445.3300 or email fire@oak-park.us.

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