Article Side

Is a â€œsilent killerâ€• lurking in your home? by Ray Johnson

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It's something you can't see, smell or taste. But if left unguarded in your home will kill you and your loved ones while you sleep. Known as the "silent killer" carbon monoxide is actually the leading cause of fatal poisonings in North America. Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless, tasteless deadly gas that can be produced by any appliance, engine or heating device that uses combustible fuel such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood or charcoal. Carbon monoxide can leak into the home when a fuel-burning device is poorly maintained, improperly vented or breaks down. Other potential sources include automobiles left running in attached garages, clogged or blocked chimney openings, inadequate venting, malfunctioning appliances or the operation of a barbecue in an enclosed area such as your home or garage.

When inhaled it CO inhibits the blood's capacity to transport oxygen throughout the body. It can poison the body quickly in high concentrations, or slowly over long periods of time. Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea and dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness. In severe cases, CO poisoning can cause brain damage and death. The elderly, children and people with heart or respiratory conditions maybe particularly sensitive to CO.

According to Patrice De Luca, V.P. of Marketing and Business Development for Reliance Protectron Security Services, the best defense against carbon monoxide poisoning is detection and prevention. "The only way to detect this deadly gas is by installing carbon monoxide detectors," De Luca explained, recommending that detectors be installed on each level of your home. "At minimum, one should be installed outside every sleeping level." De Luca stressed the importance of having the CO detectors linked to a monitoring centre since many of those killed or injured by carbon monoxide are asleep at the time of exposure and timing is crucial for alerting emergency help.

"Protectron carbon monoxide detectors offer valuable protection by alerting you to the presence this gas and notifying the monitoring centre, which will immediately take the appropriate measures to help you," he added.

What to look for in a CO detector:

- Choose one that is listed with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard. The logos of the testing agency will be on the product.

- If you have a battery powered unit, make sure you change the detectors battery as recommended by the manufacturer, and test the unit once a month.

- Replace the unit as recommended by the manufacturer (generally between 5 and 10 years).

How to prevent CO poisoning:

- Have a qualified service technician check your furnace and other fuel-burning equipment at least once a year. o Have your chimneys cleaned and inspected at least once a year.

- Never run vehicles, motor bikes, lawn-mowers, generators, or snow blowers in attached garages, even if the doors are open.

If your carbon monoxide detector alarm sounds, De Luca advises to exit as quickly as possible and

call the fire department from a neighbour's home.

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Learn more about Carbon monoxide, home security and a burglar alarms to protect your family and your house.

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