
Carbon Monoxide Detectors Can Save Lives

CPSC Document #5010



The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends that consumers purchase and install carbon monoxide detectors with labels showing they meet the requirements of the new Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL) voluntary standard (UL 2034). The UL standard, published in April 1992, requires detectors to sound an alarm when exposure to carbon monoxide reaches potentially hazardous levels over a period of time. Detectors that meet the requirements of UL 2034 provide a greater safety margin than previously-manufactured detectors.

About 200 people die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning associated with home fuel-burning heating equipment. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced when any fuel is incompletely burned. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to flu-like illnesses and include dizziness, fatigue, headaches, nausea, and irregular breathing. Carbon monoxide can leak from faulty furnaces or fuel-fired heaters or can be trapped inside by a blocked chimney or flue. Burning charcoal inside the house or running an automobile engine in an attached garage also will produce carbon monoxide in the home.

The first line of defense against carbon monoxide is to make sure that all fuel-burning appliances operate properly. Consumers should have their home heating systems (including chimneys and flues) inspected each year for proper operations and leakage. Inspectors should check all heating appliances and their electrical and mechanical components, thermostat controls and automatic safety devices.

Properly working carbon monoxide detectors can provide an early warning to consumers before the deadly gas builds up to a dangerous level. Exposure to a low concentration over several hours can be as dangerous as exposure to high carbon monoxide levels for a few minutes - the new detectors will detect both conditions. Most of the devices cost under \$100. Each home should have at least one carbon monoxide detector in the area outside individual bedrooms. CPSC believes that carbon monoxide detectors are as important to home safety as smoke detectors are.

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