

Carbon monoxide safety



Carbon monoxide (CO) is a toxic gas that you can't see or smell, which can be harmful if you are exposed to it. It's produced when fuels are burned incompletely, including natural gas, propane, wood, tobacco and gasoline. The good news is that you can prevent CO from becoming a problem and install carbon monoxide alarms to warn you if it's present.

Don't ignore the signs of carbon monoxide

Breathing in CO depletes the oxygen in your blood. Being exposed to too much CO for too long could lead to unconsciousness, brain damage and death. If you suspect CO poisoning, get outside to fresh air and seek medical attention immediately.

Symptoms to watch for include:

- chronic headaches
- nausea
- drowsiness
- impaired judgment
- loss of coordination

If you feel better after leaving the house or building, or other occupants report the same symptoms, it could be a sign of exposure to CO. For more details about the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide, visit [Technical Safety BC](#) and the [Community for Preventable Injuries](#).

Preventing carbon monoxide problems

Maintaining your gas appliances, installing carbon monoxide alarms and ensuring proper ventilation when burning fuels are the best ways to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Here are some safety tips:

- Have your natural gas appliances installed and inspected regularly by a [Technical Safety BC](#) licensed gas contractor. Find a licensed contractor in your area by clicking on the link to [Fortis BC Gas Utility's online directory](#).
- Appliance maintenance should also include checking pipes, vents and ducts to make sure they are not disconnected, blocked or corroded. Make sure your contractor employs licensed gas fitters (ask to see the gas fitter licence) and ask if the gas fitter knows how to check heat exchangers – companies that only clean furnaces and ducting may not be qualified to do this kind of inspection.
- If you're planning energy-conservation upgrades such as caulking, draft proofing or insulation or adding high-volume exhaust fans, talk to your licensed gas contractor to ensure gas appliances and heating systems will have adequate ventilation.
- Always keep furnace fan compartment doors and/or the filter access panel in place.
- When buying equipment, look for the seal of an approved certification agency such as the [Canadian Gas Association](#) or the [Canadian Standards Association](#), and make sure to use it as intended.

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- Never use equipment designed for outdoor use, such as barbecues, camp stoves, propane lanterns, generators or lawnmowers, in any enclosed space.
- Remove vehicles and gas-powered equipment from the garage immediately after starting the engine.
- When using a wood-burning fireplace, open the damper and partially open a window or door at the level of the fireplace. Close the damper only after the fire is completely out and ashes have cooled.

Buying and installing carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms, in addition to regular appliance maintenance and functioning smoke alarms, can warn you if CO is present and provide extra protection for your home and family.

What to look for

On the package:

- Canadian Standards Association (CSA) approved models should have the CSA logo (blue flame) and current standard number (CSA 6.19-17) on the label.
- The replacement date and warranty period should be clearly listed.

Key features:

- battery operated (look for sealed lithium batteries) OR 110-volt plug-in with battery backup (note: battery backup may only operate for a few hours after the power fails)
- display that shows the peak level and hours since peak (these features show you the highest level of carbon monoxide reached and how long ago the reading occurred)

How to install them

- Install carbon monoxide alarms in bedrooms or the hallway near sleeping areas on each level of your home.
- If your CO alarm is battery operated, check batteries at least twice a year.

What to do in an emergency

If your alarm indicates high CO levels in your home or you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning:

1. Open all doors and windows and get outside to fresh air immediately.
2. Seek emergency medical attention for symptoms of CO poisoning.
3. Call Sun Peaks Utilities' Emergency Line at [250-319-0629](tel:250-319-0629) (24 hrs) or [9-1-1](tel:9-1-1) and **don't go back in the building until it's safe.**
4. After returning to the building, have a licensed gas contractor inspect your gas appliances.