

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

What is it?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is odorless, colourless, tasteless and non-irritating.

What are the sources of CO?

CO results from the incomplete combustion of fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, gasoline, coal, wood, charcoal, kerosene or other combustible materials such as tobacco and paper.

Gasoline-powered vehicles, generators, lawn mowers, snow blowers, kerosene stoves, charcoal grills, coal stoves or heaters, candles, and wood burned in fireplace or wood stoves produce CO.

What are the signs of CO building up?

Warning signs, include stale or stuffy air, excessive moisture on windows and walls and soot buildup around appliances and vents, a yellow flame, rather than a blue flame, in a natural gas appliance and a pilot light that keeps going out.

What happens when you are exposed to CO?

When breathed in to the body, CO forces oxygen from red blood cells and prevents the body from absorbing oxygen. Exposure to very low CO levels generally has no harmful effects. Prolonged exposure to high concentrations of CO can lead to unconsciousness, brain damage and, in severe cases, death.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Exposure to CO can cause symptoms such as dizziness, headache, nausea, fatigue, burning eyes, vomiting or loss of muscle control. As there could be many other causes for these symptoms, including the flue, CO poisoning is sometimes difficult to diagnose.

The severity of symptoms will vary depending upon the length and concentration of CO exposure and the health and level of physical activity of the home's occupants.

What should I do if I suspect a CO problem?

- If someone in the home is experiencing the symptoms of CO poisoning, leave the premise promptly and get medical help immediately by calling 911 or the fire department.
- If you suspect a CO problem, but no one is ill, evaluate the situation. Go outside into the fresh air. Then return to your home, open the doors and windows to allow fresh air inside and call ATCO Gas or a contractor to inspect your appliances and check your home for other possible sources of CO.