

November 4, 2019

Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week: Prevent the silent killer in your home

British Columbia's first ever Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week runs from Nov. 1 to 7 this year, and the City of Campbell River is reminding people they can prevent carbon monoxide build-up at home by properly maintaining all fuel-burning appliances and installing home alarms.

"According to the BC Coroners Service, in the past 10 years there have been almost 120 deaths due to carbon monoxide poisoning," says fire chief Thomas Doherty. "These deaths are entirely preventable, and we're issuing this reminder to help everyone stay safe and healthy."

Install carbon monoxide alarms in your home if you have a fuel-burning appliance, a fireplace or an attached garage. Fuel-burning appliances can include furnaces, hot water heaters, gas or wood fireplaces, portable fuel-burning heaters and generators, barbeques, stoves and vehicles.

"Just like smoke alarms, you should install a working carbon monoxide alarm on every storey of your home and next to each sleeping area," adds Doherty. "Make sure to test and clean carbon monoxide alarms regularly and replace them according to manufacturer's instructions."

What is carbon monoxide?

- Carbon monoxide is known as the "silent killer" because it is an invisible, tasteless and odourless gas that can be deadly. Carbon monoxide is NOT natural gas – natural gas has a harmless chemical called mercaptan added to it to make it smell like rotten eggs.
- Carbon monoxide is produced when fuels such as propane, gasoline, natural gas, heating oil or wood do not burn completely in fuel-burning appliances and devices.
- Carbon monoxide inhibits the blood's capacity to carry oxygen and can cause health problems before you even notice that it's present.
- At low levels, effects include flu-like symptoms, such as tiredness, headaches, shortness of breath and impaired motor functions.
- At high levels, or if you are exposed to low levels for long periods of time, you can experience dizziness, chest pain, poor vision and difficulty thinking.
- At very high levels, it can cause convulsions, coma and death.

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BACKGROUND

Prevent carbon monoxide in your home

- Ensure fuel-burning appliances, chimneys and vents are properly maintained, as well as cleaned and inspected annually. Visit www.technicalsaftybc.ca to find a licensed contractor near you.
- Check that all outside appliance vents are not blocked.
- Never use barbeques inside garages, even if the garage doors are open. Only use them outside, away from all doors, windows, vents, and other building openings.
- Portable fuel-burning generators should only be used outdoors in well-ventilated areas away from windows, doors, vents and other building openings.
- Ensure all portable fuel-burning heaters are vented properly, according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Never use the stove or oven to heat your home.
- Open a chimney flue before using a fireplace for adequate ventilation.
- Never run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor inside a garage, even if the garage doors are open. Always remove a vehicle from the garage immediately after starting it.

Know the symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure

- Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, as well as confusion, drowsiness, loss of consciousness and death.
- If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds, and you or other occupants are suffering from symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, get everyone out of the home immediately. Then call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number from outside.
- If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds, and no one is suffering from symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, check to see if the battery needs replacing, or the alarm has reached its "end-of-life" before calling 9-1-1.

Know the sound of your carbon monoxide alarm

- Your carbon monoxide alarm sounds different than your smoke alarm. Test BOTH alarms monthly and make sure everyone in your home knows the difference between the two alarm sounds.
- Don't be confused by the sound of your carbon monoxide alarm's low-battery warning. Follow the manufacturer's instructions so you know the difference between the low-battery warning, the "end-of-life" warning, and the alarm alerting you to the presence of carbon monoxide in your home.

Additional Resources:

- Carbon Monoxide Safety: www.carbonmonoxidesafetytips
- British Columbia Fire Chiefs' Association: www.FCABC.ca
- Fire Prevention Officers' Association of BC: www.FPOABC.bc.ca
- Fortis BC: www.fortisbc.carbonmonoxidem
- Office of the Fire Commissioner: www.gov.bc.ca/FireSafety
- Pacific Northern Gas: www.PNG.ca
- Technical Safety BC: www.technicalsaftybc.ca