
CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS Q & A



What is Carbon Monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous, colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas. CO is a common industrial hazard resulting from the incomplete burning of natural gas and any other material containing carbon such as gasoline, kerosene, oil, propane, coal, or wood.

How does it harm me?

Carbon monoxide is harmful when breathed. It is a poison which interferes with metabolism of oxygen at the cellular level. Large amounts of CO can overcome you in minutes without warning, causing you to lose consciousness and (without rescue) die. The health effects of CO depend on the concentration and length of exposure, as well as each individual's health condition. CO concentration is measured in parts per million (ppm). Most people will not experience any symptoms from prolonged exposure to CO levels up to 70 ppm. On average, about 170 people in the United States die every year from CO produced by non-automotive consumer products.

Do I need carbon monoxide alarms in my home?

MN Statute 299F.51 requires that homes be equipped with carbon monoxide alarms.

Minnesota Residential Code Section R315.2.1: For new construction, every one-family dwelling unit, each unit in a two-family dwelling unit, and each townhouse dwelling unit shall have an approved and operational carbon monoxide alarm installed where one or both of the following conditions exist:

1. Fueled-fired appliances are installed; or
2. Have attached garages that communicate with the home.

Minnesota Residential Code Section R315.2.2: An individual dwelling unit shall be equipped with carbon monoxide alarms located as required for new dwellings where:

1. Alterations, repairs (including installation or replacements of windows or doors), or additions requiring a building permit occur; or
2. One or more sleeping rooms are added or created in existing dwellings.

Exceptions:

1. Work involving the exterior surfaces of dwellings, such as the replacement of roofing or siding, the addition of an open porch or deck, or chimney repairs.

Where do I need to put the carbon monoxide alarms?

Carbon Monoxide alarms in dwelling units shall be installed outside of, and not more than 10 feet from each separate sleeping area or bedroom. Alarms shall be installed on each level containing sleeping areas or bedrooms. Where a fuel-burning appliance is located within a bedroom or its attached bathroom, a carbon monoxide alarm shall be installed within the bedroom.

CO alarms can be placed near the ceiling or near the floor because CO is nearly the same density as air.

How often should I check my batteries?

Batteries should be changed a minimum of once a year. A good way to remember is to change them when you set your clocks ahead or back for daylight savings time. Most carbon monoxide alarms emit a chirp when the battery is low. It is a good idea to test them periodically.

How long are carbon monoxide alarms reliable?

Most alarms are valid for five to seven years. You should replace your carbon monoxide alarm prior to that date. A lot of carbon monoxide alarms will emit a noise when they are at the end of their useful life, or they may have a message on a digital display.

Why does the building inspector care if my home has carbon monoxide alarms?

MN State Building Code chapter 1309.0315 charges the building inspector with the responsibility of verifying that the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are installed in accordance with the Minnesota statutes.

What if I want more information?

Call MNSPECT at 952-442-7520.