

P O Box 647, Nelson

Ph (03) 546 1537 Fax (03) 546 1542

P O Box 46, Blenheim

Ph (03) 520 9914 Fax (03) 578 9517

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Factsheet

1. What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide (CO), is an colourless, odourless gas. If inhaled, at varying quantities, it is capable of causing illness and in severe cases, death.

2. Where is CO found?

Carbon monoxide comes from a range of sources, including emissions from:

- incompletely burned carbon-based material, e.g. wood, paper, fuel
- internal combustion engines (cars, trucks, forklifts, etc)
- kilns and boilers
- welding and plastics moulding
- space heaters, oil or gas heaters

CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.

3. What are the symptoms of acute CO poisoning?

Common symptoms include headache, dizziness, weakness, confusion and nausea. High levels can cause chest pains, hallucinations, convulsions, loss of consciousness or death. **If you or someone you know has these symptoms and may have been exposed to carbon monoxide, seek medical treatment immediately.**

4. How does CO poisoning work?

CO competes with oxygen in binding to red blood cells in the body. CO is picked up more quickly and if there is a lot in the air, oxygen gets displaced by CO in blood. Oxygen is blocked from getting into the body. This causes tissue damage and in severe cases, death.

5. Who is at risk from CO poisoning?

All people and animals are at risk. However certain groups are more vulnerable - unborn babies, infants, and people with chronic heart disease, anaemia, or respiratory problems.

6. How to prevent CO poisoning at home?

Move CO generating processes (see Point 1) outside to allow good ventilation while operating

Have your heating systems (including water) and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.

Do not use unflued gas heaters or portable flameless chemical heaters (catalytic) indoors. Although these heaters don't have a flame, they burn gas and can cause CO to build up inside your home.

Never run a car or truck in the garage with the garage door shut.

This Fact Sheet has been adapted from:

- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: <http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>

- Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. Carbon Monoxide Factsheet:

<http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/information-guidance/pdf-documents-library/forklifts-co-01.pdf>