

# Carbon Monoxide — The Silent Killer

The winter months are here. As the mercury begins to dip, some families, struggling to pay their heating bills, will turn on the kitchen stove burners and the oven in an effort to take the chill off of their home. What these families don't realize is how dangerous this practice can be. A gas oven or range top should never be used for heating. A fire could start and poisonous carbon monoxide (CO) fumes could fill the home. Any fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, space or portable heaters), generators and chimneys can produce carbon monoxide.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) there is an increased risk of dying in a home fire during the winter season. December, January and February are generally the deadliest months for fire.

Also, hundreds of people die each year from unintentional CO poisoning. Fire departments responded to an estimated 61,000 CO incidents in 2005, a 9% increase from 2004. (This excludes incidents where a fire was present.) Close to 90% of CO incidents occur in the home.

Often called a silent killer, CO is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created when fuels, such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil and methane, burn incompletely.

CO enters the body through breathing. CO poisoning can be confused with flu symptoms, food poisoning and other illnesses. Some symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light headedness or headaches.

Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning, but infants, pregnant women and people with physical conditions that limit their ability to use oxygen, such as emphysema, asthma or heart disease, can be more severely affected by low concentrations of CO than healthy adults. High levels of CO can be fatal for anyone, causing death within minutes.

The goal of the Polk County Fire District No.1 is to reduce the number of carbon monoxide incidents in our district and discourage anyone from using the range or oven to heat their home. Install CO alarms inside your home to provide early warning of accumulating CO. Have your heating equipment inspected by a professional every year before cold weather sets in.

- CO alarms are not substitutes for smoke alarms. Know the difference between the sound of smoke alarms and CO alarms.
- Test CO alarms at least once a month.
- If your CO alarm sounds, immediately move to a fresh air location and call for help. Remain at the fresh air location until emergency personnel say it is okay.
- If the audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries or other trouble indicators.

The Polk County Fire District No.1 wants everyone to be warm and safe this winter. Make sure your home has carbon monoxide alarms.

