In February 2015, a 47 year old female house cleaner died of carbon monoxide poisoning while working in a private residence near Jackson, WY. Early reports indicated there was a carbon monoxide leak from the furnace or boiler.

October 2016

Carbon Monoxide: Called the Silent Killer

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a clear, colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas. Anything that burns fuel, such as wood, charcoal, oil, gasoline, kerosene, and natural gas, produces carbon monoxide. This includes motor vehicles, power tools and equipment, and heating and cooking appliances of all sizes. Carbon monoxide can quickly build up in enclosed spaces. It can be lethal in a small dose over time or a high dose in a short time.

The Facts

Everyone is at risk for CO poisoning. Most cases occur in fall and winter. People have died in their homes from faulty furnaces and in campers or tents while running generators or other heat sources. Workers are at particular risk when working in confined or enclosed spaces with equipment powered by gasoline or some other fuel.

There is no surveillance system tracking CO poisoning cases in Wyoming or the U.S., but the burden can be estimated from various health data sources. One study estimated more than 230,000 emergency visits and more than 22,000 hospitalizations related to unintentional non-fire related (UNFR) CO poisoning in the U.S. in 2007. Another revealed 6,136 deaths from UNFR CO poisoning in the U.S. during 1999-2012, an average of 438 deaths per year.

In 2015, carbon monoxide poisoning contributed to the deaths of six people in Wyoming. One worker died from carbon monoxide poisoning while cleaning a house near Jackson, WY (See inset).

Also in Wyoming, during the period July 2015 thru June 2016:

• 35 Wyoming residents called the Wyoming Poison Center to report unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning.

• There were 27 outpatient hospitalizations for carbon monoxide poisoning. Twenty of these occurred during December 2015 – March 2016.

• There were at least eight workers’ compensation claims involving carbon monoxide exposure.


3 Data provided by the Wyoming Department of Health, Vital Statistics Services. Includes deaths with IDC-10 code T58 as a primary or secondary cause.


5 Data provided by the Wyoming Department of Health, Injury Prevention Program.

6 Preliminary data provided by the Wyoming Health Department, Hospital Discharge Dataset. Includes discharges with ICD-9 code 986 and ICD-10 code T58.
Know the Symptoms
Low to moderate carbon monoxide poisoning may cause:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Dizziness

High level or prolonged carbon monoxide poisoning may cause:

- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Loss of muscular coordination
- Loss of consciousness
- Death

Carbon monoxide poisoning can often be confirmed with a blood test soon after exposure.

How to Prevent Exposure
Every home should have a CO detector installed on every level, in or near sleep areas, and in rooms where fuel burning appliances or heat sources are located. Detectors should also be used in tents and camping trailers when running a generator, heat source, or cooking appliance. They should also be installed in mobile homes and boats.

Workplaces should follow NIOSH and OSHA recommendations for preventing CO exposure. These include not operating gasoline powered equipment inside buildings or in partially enclosed areas, following OSHA’s confined space air quality testing and monitoring standards (CFR 1910.146), providing personal CO monitors to workers at risk, and educating workers about the dangers and symptoms of CO exposure. OSHA’s permissible exposure limit for carbon monoxide is 50 parts per million (ppm), 55mg/m³ time weighted average (TWA). NIOSH’s recommended exposure limit is 35 ppm, 40 mg/m³ TWA.

If a CO alarm is sounding, or you or others around you are experiencing symptoms, go outside to fresh air immediately. Call emergency services, the fire department or 911. Let the professionals find the source.

Information was adapted from the following resources. For more information or detail visit:

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/co/

U.S. CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/co-comp/


Data provided by the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, Workers’ Compensation Program. Includes accepted and denied claims. Includes claims with ICD-9 code 986, ICD-10 code T58, or claims with carbon monoxide exposure cited in the incident description.