

# CITY OF MUSCATINE



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## STAY SAFE FROM EXPOSURE TO CARBON MONOXIDE

**MUSCATINE, Iowa** – Cold weather can prompt homeowners to use additional heating equipment like fuel-burning fireplaces and portable generators when necessary. The use of this equipment and other heat-producing appliances can increase the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) exposure when they are not maintained and used properly.

Lorraine Carli, NFPA Vice President for Outreach and Advocacy, writes about ways to stay safe from this deadly poison.

So just what is carbon monoxide? CO is an invisible, colorless, odorless gas created when fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil, and methane) burn

## DANGER!

### CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING



Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that kills without warning. It claims the lives of hundreds of people every year and makes thousands more ill. Many household items including gas- and oil-burning furnaces, portable generators, and charcoal grills produce this poison gas. Following these important steps can keep your family safe.

#### CO DETECTORS

- Install battery-operated or battery back-up CO detectors near every sleeping area in your home.
- Check CO detectors regularly to be sure they are functioning properly.

#### OIL & GAS FURNACES

- Have your furnace inspected every year.

#### PORTABLE GENERATORS

- Never use a generator inside your home or garage, even if doors and windows are open.
- Only use generators outside, more than 20 feet away from your home, doors, and windows.



## PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

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incompletely. Exposure to low levels of CO over time or high levels in a short period of time can result in illness and death. CO poisoning is often called the **“silent killer”** as people are often unaware of their exposure, and the effects include dizziness, sleepiness, and headaches, mimicking other illnesses.

According to research, portable generators are the leading cause of home non-fire carbon monoxide deaths followed by heating appliances and systems, requiring careful use. Hundreds of people die from CO poisoning each year in the US, with thousands more negatively impacted by low-level exposure. By following these important tips, we can help avoid CO exposure:

- Use generators outdoors in well-ventilated areas at least 20 feet (7 meters) from all doors, windows, and vent openings.
- Never use a generator in an attached garage, even with the door open.
- Place generators so that exhaust fumes can't enter the home through windows, doors, or other openings in the building. The exhaust must be directed away from the building.

These tips and many more can be found at [free downloadable generator safety tip sheet](#).

NFPA's short video, [“What You Didn’t Know about CO Poisoning”](#) is also a great resource for additional information.

How can people help prevent CO poisoning at home? One of the most important ways to safeguard against exposure is to install CO alarms. Easy to find and use, CO alarms help keep every member of the family safe. A few tips to keep in mind about CO alarms:

- Choose a CO alarm that is listed by a qualified testing laboratory.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for placement and mounting height.

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- Install CO alarms in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home and in other locations where required by applicable laws, codes, or standards.
- Test alarms at least once a month; replace them according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Move immediately to a fresh air location outdoors or by an open window or door when the CO alarm sounds. Make sure everyone inside the home is accounted for. Call for help from a fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel arrive.

As the winter cold continues and the snow continues to fall, these additional tips can also help reduce our CO exposure:

- Remove a car from the garage when starting it, to warm it up. Do not run the vehicle or other fuel engine or motor indoors, even if garage doors are open. Make sure the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle is not covered with snow.
- Clear snow build-up from vents for the dryer, furnace, stove, and fireplace both during and after a snowstorm.
- Open the flue for adequate ventilation when using a fireplace.
- Use ovens for cooking only; never use an oven to heat the home.

Together we can help protect families from the dangers of carbon monoxide.

For more information about home winter fire safety and CO exposure, check out the ["Put a Freeze on Winter Fires"](#) webpage where you will find safety tips, including NFPA's [free CO safety tips sheet](#), and other free downloadable resources to share.