CARBON MONOXIDE AWARENESS & SAFETY CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT

This toolkit contains key messages, suggestions, links and resources to support the different ways your fire department or life safety organization can share the message about carbon monoxide safety in your community.

KEY MESSAGES

- Have fuel-burning appliances installed and inspected regularly by a Technical Safety BC licensed gas contractor. Find a licensed contractor in your area using the online directory at [www.technicalsafetybc.ca/find-contractor](http://www.technicalsafetybc.ca/find-contractor)
- Never use equipment designed for outdoor use, such as barbecues, camp stoves, propane lanterns, generators or lawnmowers, in any enclosed space.
- Remove vehicles and gas-powered equipment from the garage immediately after starting the engine.
- When using a wood-burning fireplace, open the damper and partially open a window or door at the level of the fireplace. Close the damper only after the fire is completely out and ashes have cooled.
- Carbon monoxide alarms, in addition to regular appliance maintenance and functioning smoke alarms, can warn you if CO is present and provide extra protection for your home and family.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms in bedrooms or the hallway near sleeping areas on each level of your home.
- If your CO alarm is battery operated, check batteries at least twice a year.
- Replace all CO alarms according to manufacturers’ instructions.
- If your alarm indicates high CO levels in your home or you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning:
  - Open all doors and windows and get outside to fresh air immediately.
  - Seek emergency medical attention for symptoms of CO poisoning. Symptoms include flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness.
  - Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number and your gas service provider’s 24-hour emergency line. Don’t go back in the building until it’s safe.
    - FortisBC: 1-800-663-9911
    - Pacific Northern Gas: 1-800-663-1173
  - After returning to the building, have a licensed contractor inspect your gas appliances.
GET INVOLVED

A range of digital and printed resources are available at www.CO safety.tips to help you promote CO safety within your community.

Door-to-door Campaign

A door-to-door campaign is a great way for fire departments to get out in the community to make sure people have CO alarms in their homes. You can hand out free or discounted CO alarms, offer to test/change batteries in existing alarms, or just have a friendly conversation about the importance of CO alarms, as well as proper placement, testing, maintenance and replacement. Consider targeting your program to high-risk residents in your community, such as seniors.

Leave a door hanger behind if the resident isn’t home. You can order free printed door hangers from the Fire Prevention Officers’ Association of BC that include room for you to add your department’s contact information, as well as CO safety and prevention tips.

Social Media Campaign - #COsafety

Don’t underestimate the power of social media. Use the pre-made social media graphics and suggested content to run a campaign on your social media channel(s). Watch for posts from campaign partners and other stakeholders and be sure to interact with them online.

The official hashtag in British Columbia is #COsafety

All posts on social media should include this hashtag, along with any other tags that may be relevant to your activity. One example is #TestItTuesday, which is a great way to encourage people to test their CO alarms (you can mention testing smoke alarms at the same time!).

Fire Department Open House

Hosting an open house at the fire department is a great way to bring awareness to carbon monoxide prevention and safety. Make your open house an interactive experience for all ages by creating activity stations for the community to participate in. Possible activities include:

- fire hall tours
- carbon monoxide and smoke alarms demonstrations
- fire extinguisher demonstrations
- junior firefighter obstacle course
- hose demonstrations
- turn-out gear demonstrations
- crawl low under smoke demonstrations
- stop, drop and roll demonstrations

Life Safety Displays and Fairs

Organize a carbon monoxide and life safety display, booth or fair at local malls, schools and community halls. Use this opportunity to educate the public about important lifesaving messages and actions, such
as the importance of carbon monoxide and/or smoke alarms, how to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, the difference between carbon monoxide and natural gas, home escape planning and general life safety tips. You may want to provide carbon monoxide and/or smoke alarms and batteries, or other items, as draw prizes throughout the event.

Working with the Media

- Contact local media well in advance of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week to educate them about the importance of CO prevention.
- Invite the media to join your department’s Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week event.
- Using the template, create a news release to inform media about your Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week activities.
- Provide media with story ideas, safety announcements, statistics, safety tips and graphics. Visit www.COsafety.tips for digital resources. Some possible story ideas include:
  - role of the fire department in CO prevention and awareness
  - how to install, test and maintain CO alarms
  - local incidents and lessons learned
- Work with your local newspaper(s) to create a Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week supplement section. Encourage the newspaper to sell advertising spots for the supplement to cover costs, and in return provide them with content for the supplement. Some content for the supplement includes:
  - feature stories and interviews
  - letter from the Fire Chief
  - photos (or provide photo opportunities for media to take their own photos)

RESOURCES

Visit www.gov.bc.ca/FireSafety/carbonMonoxideAwareness or www.COsafety.tips to download the following free resources to help raise awareness in your community about carbon monoxide safety.

  - Website banner
  - Doorhangers
  - Social media graphics and suggested posts
  - News release template
  - Email banner

COMMON QUESTIONS

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?
Carbon monoxide (CO) is a toxic gas that you can’t see or smell, which can be harmful if you are exposed to it. It's produced when fuels are burned incompletely, including natural gas, propane, wood, tobacco and gasoline. The good news is that you can prevent CO from becoming a problem and install carbon monoxide alarms to warn you if it’s present.

HOW IS IT PRODUCED?

CO is produced in high concentrations by incomplete combustion of various fuel sources such as coal, wood, charcoal, oil, gasoline, kerosene, propane and natural gas. One major cause is a failure to service and maintain a fuel-burning appliance, which can lead to blocked burners or flue, and inadequate ventilation in the room. Once CO is produced in dangerous levels, it can spill from the appliance and enter your home undetected.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES?

Carbon monoxide is made whenever you burn fuel like oil, coal, wood, gasoline, propane or natural gas. It's also contained in second-hand smoke.

Any fuel-burning appliance, engine or device that is malfunctioning or improperly installed can release carbon monoxide. This becomes a risk when used in unventilated areas, such as a home, garage, cottage, camper or tent.

- Furnaces, gas range/stove, gas clothes dryer, water heater, portable fuel-burning space heaters, fireplaces, barbecues, generators and wood burning stoves.
- Vehicles, generators and other combustion engines running in an attached garage or other enclosed space.
- Blocked chimney or flue.
- Cracked or loose furnace exchanger.
- Back-drafting.

WHO IS AT RISK?

All people and animals are at risk of CO poisoning.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS? WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMEONE IS EXPOSED TO CARBON MONOXIDE?

It causes flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness. Exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide over time can also lead to long term chronic health problems. In severe cases, CO poisoning reduces oxygenations in the body by displacing oxygen absorption at a cellular level and can result in brain damage and death.

If you suspect CO poisoning, get into fresh air immediately and call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Once you're at the hospital, treatment may involve:

- Breathing pure oxygen through a mask placed over your nose and mouth. This helps oxygen reach your organs and tissues. If you can't breathe on your own, a machine (ventilator) may be used.
In many cases, hyperbaric oxygen therapy is recommended. This therapy involves breathing pure oxygen in a chamber in which the air pressure is about two to three times higher than normal. This speeds the replacement of carbon monoxide with oxygen in your blood.

HOW IS IT PREVENTED?

Properly maintaining fuel-burning appliances, installing carbon monoxide alarms and ensuring proper ventilation when burning fuels are the best ways to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.