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CONTACT: Wendy Forbes
(303) 252-3017

THE SILENT KILLER

Broomfield/Northglenn, CO—What is invisible, odorless, colorless, tasteless, extremely deadly and causing more emergencies than ever before across the United States? Carbon Monoxide (CO). In fact, carbon monoxide is the top poison killer in the United States. A recently released report from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) shows an 18% increase in non-fire, CO emergencies from 2003 to 2005.

CO is produced whenever any fuel such as gas, oil, kerosene, wood or charcoal is burned. If appliances that require these fuels are maintained and in good working order, the amount of Carbon Monoxide people are exposed to is usually not hazardous. However, if the appliances are malfunctioning or not used properly, dangerous levels of CO can result.

The dangers of CO exposure depend on a number of variables, including the victim's health and activity level. Infants, pregnant women, and people with physical conditions that limit their body's ability to use oxygen (i.e., emphysema, asthma, heart disease) can be more severely affected by lower concentrations of CO than healthy adults would be.

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When CO is inhaled, it enters the blood stream and reduces the ability of the blood to carry oxygen to vital organs, such as the heart and brain. CO poisoning can be confused with flu symptoms, food poisoning and other illnesses. What are the symptoms you should look for in the beginning stages of CO poisoning?

- Headache
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Drowsiness
- Ringing in the ears

How to Protect Yourself

Begin by installing CO alarms in central locations of your home. Place an alarm near the sleeping areas of your house and be sure that there is one CO alarm on each level of the house. The next essential step is to maintain these alarms so they can work for you! Test the CO alarms each month, following the manufacturer's instructions and replace the alarms' batteries every six months.

Additional safety tips include never warming up your vehicle inside your garage. Pull the vehicle out to your driveway in order to have plenty of air to help dissipate the CO. Also have your fireplace, furnace and wood stove inspected each year for any cracks or mechanical problems. Finally, only use your barbeque grill outside—never in your home or your garage.

Act quickly if your CO Alarm activates! Get everyone in the house outside immediately. Then use a cell phone or borrow a phone at your neighbor's house to call 9-1-1. Watch for signs of CO poisoning, if signs appear also request medical attention from the 9-1-1 dispatcher. Finally, do not re-enter your home until the fire department or gas company says it is safe.

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