

## Living Safe

# CO poisoning

By Pete Hypes

For years, the fire service, the medical community, and insurance companies have stressed the importance of having carbon monoxide detectors in homes and businesses. A fact about carbon monoxide is that our bodies have a 200 times greater affinity for CO than it does for oxygen. In other words, our bodies desire carbon monoxide (not to be confused with carbon dioxide) over oxygen, but carbon monoxide can kill us. There are two lethal situations with carbon monoxide, the acute and the cumulative exposures. An acute exposure is an immediate high dose, and the cumulative effect occurs at a lower dose over a longer period. At the end of each scenario, the result could be death if not diagnosed and corrected.

An elderly couple died a few days ago, from an acute exposure to carbon monoxide. From what I read, police responded to check on the welfare of this couple and found them upstairs in their home with a vehicle running in the garage. You may ask, where does carbon monoxide come from? The simple answer is that CO is a byproduct of incomplete combustion. Any time that a fuel is burned, the potential exists for CO to be given off. You might say, well I am safe, I have an electric heat pump. The question is, where is your air handler? If it is in the garage where you park your car, then you are at risk. You



should never warm your car in the garage. Start the car and pull or back out into your driveway to warm it up. Gas-burning appliances, whether natural, propane, kerosene or fuel oil, all have the potential of putting off CO. Another characteristic is that you cannot see or smell carbon monoxide.

What does exposure to CO look like? Some of the signs and symptoms are nausea, vomiting, headache, and dizziness, which all lead to unconsciousness. There may be a reddening of the skin. Most people do not know that a problem exists. Fire departments carry equipment that can monitor a space detecting the level of CO. Proper ventilation of a space is vital to prevent the buildup of CO levels or to evacuate the expected high levels of CO. Once a person has been exposed, then they must be moved to fresh air or placed on high-flow oxygen. In some cases, there may need to be hyperbaric treatment, depending on the level of exposure.

As I have plead the case for smoke alarms, I am also stating the importance of having a CO detector. You can buy many types of CO detectors, even combination smoke/CO detectors. Many times, you will find CO detectors are placed lower in a room simply because

## RECENTLY DECEASED

**ANDRE**, Mrs. Sara Esther, 97, of Chesterfield, widow of Ernest Joseph Andre.  
**BEASLEY**, Mr. Steven Harden, 31, of Chesterfield.  
**BRATTON**, Mr. Barlan Elbert "Bill," 77, of North Chesterfield, husband of Carol B. Bratton.  
**CUMBEA-ALLEN**, Ms. Dana Lynn, 44, of North Chesterfield.  
**DAY**, Mrs. Melba Walton, 63, of North Chesterfield, wife of Paul Walton.  
**DIETERICH**, Mrs. Doris G., 89, of Chesterfield, widow of Warren C. Dieterich.  
**DRISKILL**, Mrs. Barbara Jean "Fuzzy" Vaughan, 86, of Matoaca, wife of S. Phil Driskill Jr.  
**EUBANK**, Mr. Robert "Sam Bob," 73, of Chesterfield, widower of Toni Eubank.  
**HANER**, Mrs. Kimmie Jo Cogar, 58, of South Chesterfield, wife of Marvin J. Haner Jr.  
**HILL**, Mr. Franklin Sr., 67, of Chesterfield, widower of Margit Hill.  
**JANOSIK**, Mr. Benjamin P. Sr., 90, of Chester, husband of Jean Meadows Janosik.  
**Lupo**, Mr. Russell, 74, of Chesterfield, a Navy veteran, husband of Sina Belle Lupo.  
**MILLS**, Mr. Brian Charles, 48, of Chester, husband of Melissa M. Mills.  
**PLAIN**, Mr. Duane A., 75, of Chester, an Air Force veteran, husband of Colleen Plain.  
**SAWTELLE**, Mrs. Martha Ann King, 88, of North Chesterfield, wife of Charles C. Sawtelle Jr.  
**SELLERS**, Mrs. Mildred Sutherland, 87, of Chesterfield, wife of Joseph B. Sellers.  
**TAYLOR**, Mr. Woodford Dave, 76, of Chesterfield, a Navy veteran, husband of Jean Taylor.  
**WALTON-DAY**, Mrs. Melba, 63, of North Chesterfield, wife of Paul Walton.  
**WELLS**, Ms. Georgia Anne, 86, of Chester.  
**WILLIAMS**, Mr. Alfred, 59, of Chesterfield, an Army veteran, husband of Helen Williams.  
**WILLIAMS**, Mrs. Victoria Jean, 54, of Chesterfield, wife of William L. Parker.  
**WRIGHT**, Mr. Don H., 81, of Chesterfield, husband of Lou Wright.  
**YATES**, Mr. Eddie Iverson, 72, of Chester, companion of Charlotte Panther and widower of Bonnie Jones Yates.

some plug into an outlet, or placed where people are. CO is neither lighter than nor heavier than air. What that means is that it neither falls nor rises, but simply fills an entire space. If a CO detector goes off, due to an increased level, you should evacuate and ventilate. Opening doors and windows will help, as well as turning on fans. To reset the detector, it will have to be moved to fresh air. As I stated, any level of CO is a problem, because of the cumulative effect. What is causing the CO must be located and repaired. I did

not say this earlier, but CO is considered the silent killer.

To conclude, CO is a byproduct of combustion of anything that uses a fuel to burn or operate. Proper ventilation is vital, even when an appliance is burning as clean and completely as possible. The human body desires CO, but is destroyed by it. That statement would preach! You must be aware of CO, the measures that must be taken to prevent exposure, and the ways to deal with an exposure. Do not disregard the BEEP!!!

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