

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a dangerous, colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas. Although it lacks a detectable smell, CO is often mixed with other gases that do have an odor. This means you could inhale carbon monoxide along with gases you can smell—without realizing CO is present.

CO is a common hazard in industrial settings, often produced when materials containing carbon, such as natural gas, gasoline, kerosene, oil, propane, coal, or wood, burn incompletely. Sources like forges, blast furnaces, and coke ovens produce CO, but in workplaces, exposure often comes from internal combustion engines.

Carbon monoxide is harmful when inhaled because it displaces oxygen in the bloodstream, depriving the heart, brain, and other vital organs of oxygen. In high concentrations, CO can cause unconsciousness and suffocation within minutes, without warning.

Early symptoms of CO poisoning include chest tightness, headache, fatigue, dizziness, drowsiness, and nausea. People with angina may experience sudden chest pain. With prolonged or high exposure, symptoms can worsen, causing vomiting, confusion, collapse, loss of consciousness, and muscle weakness. Symptoms vary between individuals, and CO poisoning can occur more rapidly in young children, the elderly, people with heart or lung conditions, those at high altitudes, and smokers. Fetuses are also at special risk from CO exposure.

CO poisoning can be reversed if treated quickly. However, severe cases may cause permanent damage to oxygen-dependent organs like the heart and brain, and CO exposure is also linked to reproductive risks. If you suspect CO poisoning, immediately take these steps:

- Move the person to fresh air in an open area.
- Call 911 or emergency services for medical help.
- If the person is breathing, administer 100% oxygen with a tight-fitting mask.
- Perform CPR if the person has stopped breathing.

Warning: CO exposure during rescue attempts can be fatal. Rescuers should be trained and equipped for safe recovery operations. Employers must ensure rescuers are not exposed to dangerous CO levels during rescues.

Chronic exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide can also have serious long-term effects, even if symptoms aren't immediately severe. Prolonged exposure may lead to memory issues, mood changes, and an increased risk of heart problems, especially for those with pre-existing conditions. To minimize risks, workers in environments with potential CO exposure should use proper ventilation, monitor CO levels, and follow safety protocols consistently.

Additional Topics: _____

Notes: _____

Meeting Date: _____
Conducted By: _____

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