



NEWS from STATE FIRE

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF FIRE PREVENTION & CONTROL
NYS Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Services

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STATE FIRE ADMINISTRATOR REMINDS NEW YORKERS TO INSTALL CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

The advent of the Fall-Winter heating season prompted the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control today to remind all New Yorkers of a State law that requires carbon monoxide alarms be installed in all new and existing one and two-family dwellings, multi-family dwellings and rentals that have fuel-burning appliances, heating systems or attached garages.

“Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. It is the leading cause of accidental poisoning deaths in the United States,” said State Fire Administrator Floyd A. Madison. “You cannot see it, smell it or taste it. Most carbon monoxide poisoning incidents happen during the winter months, mainly because of the increased use of fuel-burning appliances and heating systems.

“The only safe way to detect this gas is with a carbon monoxide alarm,” Madison said. “Carbon monoxide alarms save lives.”

The State law, known as Amanda’s Law, went into effect February 22, 2010. The law is named for Amanda Hansen, 16, of West Seneca, Erie County, who was found unconscious at a friend's house in January 2009. Officials later determined she had been exposed to lethal levels of carbon monoxide in the home's basement, where she and her friend were having a sleepover. She later died at South Buffalo Mercy Hospital.

The law requires that carbon monoxide alarms be installed in all new and existing one and two-family dwellings, multi-family dwellings and rentals that have fuel-burning appliances, heating systems or attached garages. Homes built before Jan. 1, 2008, will be permitted to have battery-powered alarms, while homes built after that date will need to have the alarms hard-wired in.

Carbon monoxide gas is a product of incomplete combustion, Madison said. Any fuel-burning device has the potential to produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide gas. Potential sources include gas or oil furnaces, water heaters, space heaters, clothes dryers, barbecue grills, fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, gas ovens, generators and car exhaust fumes. Madison said that 90.5 percent of housing in New York State uses some form of fossil-fuel burning heat sources (gas, fuel oil or kerosene) which can generate carbon monoxide gas.

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Each year, Madison said, approximately 200 people in New York State are hospitalized because of accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. Many more are treated for exposure in emergency rooms without further hospital care. Nationally, accidental carbon monoxide poisoning kills 400 people and injures another 20,000 each year.

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are flu-like, including headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, and confusion. Prolonged exposure can result in vomiting, blackouts and, eventually, brain damage and death. The amount of the gas inhaled and how long you are exposed to it determines the effect.

Safety tips to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

- Make sure appliances are installed according to the manufacturer's instructions and by professionals.
- Have heating systems inspected and serviced at least once a year.
- Make sure chimneys and vents are checked for blockages, corrosion, and loose connections.
- Open flues completely when fireplaces are in use.
- Use proper fuel in space heaters.
- Never burn charcoal or a barbecue grill inside a home or enclosed space.
- Never use portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside a home, garage, vehicle, or tent.
- Never leave a car, mower, or other such item running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- Never operate unvented fuel-burning appliances in any room where people are sleeping.
- Never use the kitchen range for heating a house.
- Never run a gas-powered generator in a garage, basement, or near any overhang on the home. Keep it at a distance.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon monoxide gas is almost identical in weight to air and thus mixes freely in it. For this reason, alarms may be installed at any level in a room. If the detector is being mounted on a ceiling, it should be installed away from existing smoke alarms in order to be able to distinguish between the carbon monoxide and smoke alarms in an emergency. Every home should be equipped with at least one carbon monoxide alarm near the sleeping area. For maximum protection, additional alarms should be located on each level of your home.

If your carbon monoxide alarm sounds, stay calm. If anyone is experiencing symptoms, you need to get everyone into fresh air and call 911 from a neighbor's home. If no one is experiencing symptoms, you should call the fire department or a qualified technician from a neighbor's home to have the problem inspected. If you are unable to leave the home to call for help, open the doors and windows, and turn off all possible sources while you are waiting for assistance to arrive. Most importantly – under no circumstance should an alarm be ignored.

For more information on carbon monoxide, visit the OFPC website at <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/fire/COtoolkit.htm>

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