

Statutory Requirement for the Installation and Maintenance of Carbon Monoxide Alarms/Detectors

In One and Two Family Dwellings

Effective February 01, 2011

Carbon monoxide (CO) is the leading cause of accidental poisoning in the United States. The Wisconsin Legislature acted in 2010 to create statutory language requiring carbon monoxide detectors to be installed in all new and existing one and two family dwellings effective February 01, 2011. This law requires carbon monoxide detector installation in all one and two family dwellings which have attached garages or contain any fuel burning appliances.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2005, municipal fire departments responded to an estimated 61,100 non-fire carbon monoxide incidents, where carbon monoxide was present, an average of seven (7) calls each hour. Department of Commerce Secretary, Paul Jadin, reminds citizens, "CO alarms have shown their effectiveness in alerting occupants to the presence of this poisonous gas."

What is Carbon Monoxide (CO)?

Carbon monoxide is often called, "The Silent Killer." Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless, colorless gas created as a byproduct of any fuels (such as gasoline, wood, coal, natural gas, propane, oil, and methane) because of incomplete combustion of the fuel.

Can Carbon Monoxide Cause Poisoning?

Yes, carbon monoxide can cause poisoning. High levels of carbon monoxide can be fatal, causing death within minutes.

What Are The Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning?

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may include any or all of the following: shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, light headedness, flu-like symptoms, or headaches.

What Does This New Law Mean For Me?

- One-and two-family dwellings for which a building permit is issued on or after February 1, 2011 require carbon monoxide alarms that are interconnected and directly wired to the dwelling's electrical service, with a backup battery supply.
- Existing dwellings (all structures in place before February 01, 2011) may use battery-powered, single station (stand-alone) alarms – they are not required to be interconnected.
- Alarms must be installed in the basement and on each floor level except the attic or garage.
- The law applies only to dwellings that contain CO producing appliances/sources. CO sources may include, but are not limited to: attached garages (vehicles), space heaters, fireplaces (wood or

gas), supplementary heat sources, wood, pellet, etc., stoves, gas supplied (LP or natural) water heaters, gas (LP or natural) supplied clothes dryers, gas appliances (LP or natural) used for cooking, or any sources that use coal, wood, petroleum products, or other fuels that will, or could, emit CO as a by-product of combustion.

Who Is Responsible For The Installation of Carbon Monoxide Detectors?

- The owner of the property is responsible for installations.
- Owners must repair or replace defective alarms within five (5) days of written notice from an occupant or an inspector.
- Authorized inspectors may enter dwellings to inspect alarms when requested by owners or occupants.
- Tampering with any alarm device is illegal, dangerous, and can cause serious liability concerns.

Where Should Carbon Monoxide Alarms Be Installed?

- Carbon monoxide disperses in air much the way smoke does. You need to install CO alarms on every floor that contains one or more sleeping areas and in the basement. Devices shall be installed within 21 feet of the centerline of the door of the sleeping areas in the exit (egress pathway.) If you have, or purchase, a combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarm, you do not need to install a stand alone carbon monoxide alarm. For existing homes you can install battery operated devices or you can also purchase units that plug into an outlet. These devices still need to be spaced accurately, but allow owners to use the building's electrical system to power the devices. Never install any detection device without always reading and following the manufacturer's instructions.
- On floor levels that do not contain a sleeping area, a carbon monoxide alarm shall be installed in a common area on each floor level.

Where Can I Obtain A Carbon Monoxide Alarm & How Much Do They Cost?

- Carbon Monoxide Alarms can be purchased at a large variety of big box retail and hardware stores, as well as via the internet.
- The average cost of a carbon monoxide alarm can range from between \$25 to \$50 per device depending on the type.
- The alarms will be stand alone or combination units, powered by batteries, tied into the home's electrical system or interconnected with battery backup. **Remember if your unit does not have battery backup, if you lose electrical power, you lose protection.**
- Installation must follow manufacturers' instructions. Those instructions are provided with all
- new devices either in the box or printed on the box.

Alarms used in Wisconsin must be listed and labeled by Underwriters Laboratories (UL2034.) This is indicated on the package, as well as on the unit itself.

What Is The Life Span of a Carbon Monoxide Alarm?

The average life span of a carbon monoxide alarm is five (5) years. However, this life span may vary according to manufacturer. Always check the manufacturer's instructions for confirmation of the life span of each unit.

How Often Do I Test My Carbon Monoxide Alarm(s)?

Test your carbon monoxide alarm once a month according to the manufacturer's instructions.

How Do I Maintain My Carbon Monoxide Alarm(s)?

- At least monthly, use your vacuum cleaners hose attachment and upholstery brush to gently remove dust from the interior and exterior of your carbon monoxide alarms. This is the same practice you should already be using with your smoke alarms.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms in locations free of heavy dust and away from household chemical fumes to help the alarm work best.
- Never paint a carbon monoxide alarm or any detection/alarm device.

What Should I Do If My Carbon Monoxide Alarm Sounds?

- Get all occupants in the building outdoors immediately.
- Call 9-1-1 from outside your home.
- Report all symptoms to emergency medical personnel that arrive on scene.
- Do not go back inside until the fire department advises that it is safe to do so.

Please contact our Division Chief of Prevention, Inspection and Investigation, Rich Heft, at 608-278-2980, or rich.heft@city.fitchburg.wi.us, for questions regarding the new carbon monoxide detector law, or any other fire or life safety questions.

www.city.fitchburg.wi.us/fire