

RISK SIMPLIFIED

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Carbon Monoxide Exposure

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According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), carbon monoxide poses a significant risk because it is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, and toxic gas. In addition to these traits making it almost impossible for employees to detect without assistance, dangerous levels of carbon monoxide can accumulate and overcome an employee without warning in just minutes.

Although there are several sources of carbon monoxide, the most common source of exposure in the workplace is equipment that uses combustion to operate. Some examples present at public agencies include: vehicle exhausts, fuel burning furnaces, small gasoline engines, portable gasoline-powered generators, power tools, compressors, forklifts, pressure washers, welding equipment, space heaters, and gas water heaters.

Common symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure are headache, nausea/vomiting, rapid breathing, weakness, fatigue/drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, and hallucinations. Severe carbon monoxide poisoning can cause neurological damage, loss of consciousness and death.

Preventing Carbon Monoxide Exposure

To reduce the risk of carbon monoxide exposure in the workplace, ensure correct use of equipment and effective ventilation systems are in place. The following steps should also be taken to reduce the risk:

- Ensure equipment is in good working order and maintained according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Never use gas powered equipment indoors or in enclosed or partially-enclosed spaces such as garages, crawl spaces, and basements. Opening windows and doors in an enclosed space may prevent carbon monoxide buildup.
- Make sure equipment has 3-4 feet of clear space on all sides and above it to ensure adequate ventilation.



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- Gas powered equipment should be kept outside at least 20 feet from doors, windows, or intake vents which could allow carbon monoxide to enter and build up in occupied spaces.
- Consider switching to battery-powered or electric equipment to eliminate the risk
- If an employee experiences symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure immediately turn off the equipment, move to fresh air and seek medical attention.

Employers should use carbon monoxide detectors in areas where the hazard is a concern and educate employees about the symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure. In addition, employers should also conduct a workplace survey to identify and then educate workers about potential sources of carbon monoxide and steps to take to prevent build up and exposure.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can be avoided if the proper precautions are taken. For questions or additional information on carbon monoxide poisoning, please contact [Risk Control](#).

