

Carbon Monoxide

About 9 minutes to deliver

No colour, no smell, no warning — and the symptoms feel exactly like a long day, right up until people stop being able to walk out.

Carbon monoxide has no colour, no smell and no taste. Your body takes it up in place of oxygen and holds onto it, so you keep getting worse in an atmosphere that feels no different from when you walked in.

The limit in Table Z-1 of 1910.1000 is 50 ppm over eight hours. A petrol generator running in an enclosed space reaches many times that in minutes.

WHAT PRODUCES IT

Anything burning fuel:

- Generators and compressors — the classic. Never inside, never in a doorway, never in a partly open garage or a trailer.
- Propane and kerosene salamander heaters, which is why CO poisoning peaks in winter.
- Petrol-powered concrete saws, floor buffers, pressure washers, power trowels and plate compactors used indoors. A petrol cut-off saw in a basement will put a crew down.
- Forklifts and vehicles running indoors or at a loading dock.
- Welding and cutting, and any exhaust ducted somewhere it can be drawn back in.

Electric or pneumatic tools instead of petrol is the single best control on this list.

THE SYMPTOMS LIE

- Early: headache, tiredness, feeling slightly sick, dizzy, out of breath on stairs. Every one of those reads as a long shift or a bug.
- Then: confusion, poor coordination, chest pain, vomiting, blurred vision.
- Then: collapse and death.

Two things to hold onto. If more than one person in the same space has a headache, get everyone out — that pattern is CO until proved otherwise. And the classic "cherry red skin" almost never shows up before somebody is critical, so do not wait for it.

WHAT TO DO

- Get out into fresh air immediately. Do not go back in for anyone unless you have supplied air and a plan — CO has killed rescuers who walked in after their workmate.
- Call 911 and say you suspect carbon monoxide. They can measure it and they carry oxygen.
- Anyone exposed goes to hospital even if they feel better outside. CO stays bound in the blood for hours and the treatment is oxygen.

PREVENTING IT

- Engines outdoors, downwind, well away from any opening. Doors and windows count as openings, and so does an air intake.
- A CO monitor in any enclosed space where fuel is burning, and a personal one for confined space work. This is cheap and it is the only thing that sees it.
- Ventilation you can point at, not a cracked door.
- Maintain the heaters. A yellow, lazy flame instead of a blue one means incomplete combustion, which means CO.

ASK THE CREW

- Is anything burning fuel inside or near an opening today?
- Do we have a working CO monitor, and where is it?
- Has anyone had a headache on this job that they put down to a long day?

29 CFR 1910.1000 · 29 CFR 1926.55 · 29 CFR 1926.354

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Carbon Monoxide

About 9 minutes to deliver · 29 CFR 1910.1000 · 29 CFR 1926.55 · 29 CFR 1926.354

Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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