

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Cold Stress Prevention – Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

[Reference: (5)(a)(1) of OSH Act]

When temperatures drop, people naturally look for ways to get warm. On the job, that might mean using a portable heater inside a closed structure. At home, it might mean warming up your car in the garage. In both cases, these actions, plus many others, create a deadly hazard: **carbon monoxide** - a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that kills hundreds of people and sickens thousands more each year.

Carbon monoxide, also referred to as CO, forms whenever fuel burns – for example, gasoline, diesel, propane, kerosene, natural gas, Sterno, or even wood. Without proper ventilation, CO can build up to dangerous levels indoors, inside vehicles, or in partially enclosed areas. Common worksite sources of CO include:

- Portable or vehicle-mounted generators
- Fuel-powered heaters or compressors
- Gas or propane-powered saws, welders, or forklifts
- Idling trucks inside buildings or near building openings
- Temporary trailers, tents, or containers warmed with poorly ventilated heaters

And do not overlook potential causes of CO exposure at home, such as:

- Running vehicles with an internal combustion engine inside closed garages
- Using charcoal or gas grills indoors or in garages
- Heating any room at work, home or in a camper with an unvented gas or kerosene heater
- Blocked furnace or chimney vents due to snow, ice buildup, or any other blockage

It is important to act quickly whenever you first notice any warning signs of CO poisoning. Early symptoms mimic the flu - **headache, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, and confusion**. If you or anyone nearby starts feeling these symptoms, **move to fresh air immediately** and call for emergency help, as continued exposure can cause **loss of coordination, unconsciousness, or even death**.

CO poisoning prevention tips include:

- Never use fuel-burning heaters, stoves, or generators inside enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces.
- Keep vents clear of snow, ice, and debris.
- Install CO detectors in rooms containing any potential source of CO at work or in your home - especially near sleeping areas. CO detectors save lives by sounding an alarm before symptoms begin. Test them monthly and replace batteries twice a year.

Carbon monoxide is called *the silent killer* for a reason — you can't see it, smell it, or taste it. It can cause serious illness or death. Whether you're on the job or at home, safe heating practices and working CO detectors are your best defense.

Please remember to put your name on the sign-in sheet to get credit for attending this talk.