



Mild Winter is No Excuse to Not be Wary of Carbon Monoxide

Just in the last week: New York: father and son found dead from portable heater, Washington D.C: 3 hospitalized from faulty heater, Wisconsin: 13 workers sent to hospital from faulty propane tank, New Jersey: 15 students in fraternity evacuated due to faulty boiler, New York: 42 midshipmen evacuated from a dormitory sickened by a faulty water heater—all from carbon monoxide poisoning.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center warns citizens that even though this has been an unusually mild winter that they still should be on the watch for carbon monoxide as its calls are the same as in previous colder winters.

Each year, carbon monoxide poisoning kills nearly 500 people nationwide and sends over 15,000 to the emergency room. The Centers for Disease Control ranked **Nebraska** as the state with the highest reliable mortality rate from carbon monoxide. In 2011, the Nebraska Regional Poison Center received 268 calls concerning carbon monoxide. But this figure is misleading because carbon monoxide poisoning is always under-reported. It is imperative that the citizens of Nebraska understand the dangers, the symptoms and how to prevent poisoning from carbon monoxide.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include sleepiness, headache, dizziness, blurred vision, nausea, shortness of breath and convulsions. The first step in treating carbon monoxide poisoning is getting the victim to fresh air. Then seek medical attention immediately.

Carbon monoxide is a gas produced when fuels burn incompletely. It has no color, taste or smell. The major causes of carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Using heating equipment that is in poor repair
- Lack of ventilation in a car
- Using a charcoal grill indoors
- Using unvented space heaters

The Poison Center offers the following suggestions to help prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Inspect all fuel-burning equipment yearly.
- Vent fuel-burning heaters to the outside.
- Do not use a gas range or an oven for heating a room.
- Never use a charcoal grill or hibachi inside.
- Install carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home.
- Never leave a car running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open.
- Have the vehicle muffler and tailpipes checked regularly.

The carbon monoxide death rate is highest among people greater than 65 years of age. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning resemble those associated with other health conditions that are common among the elderly, especially in the winter.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers tips on carbon monoxide poisoning prevention as a free community service. If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning or if you have any questions, contact the Nebraska Regional Poison Center toll-free at 1-800-222-1222.