

Understanding carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide (CO) is odorless, colorless and tasteless.

Because it is so difficult to detect, CO can accumulate unnoticed and pose a serious health hazard.

CO is lighter than air.

Its specific gravity is .967. If you are using a Combustible Gas Indicator (CGI) to detect CO, be sure to move the probe up and down to various levels. Some CO may rise to the top of a room.

CO is flammable.

CO will ignite when its concentration in air is between 12 and 75 percent.

CO is toxic.

When inhaled, CO is extremely toxic because it destroys the oxygen-carrying capabilities of hemoglobin in the blood.

Although CO itself is difficult to detect, the following warning signs may indicate its presence:

- A sooty build-up around appliance draft hoods,
- Unusually high humidity indoors, with persistent condensation on walls or windows, and/or
- A sharp, pungent odor. This is not the smell of the CO itself, but an odor caused by aldehydes and alcohols that may be produced by incomplete combustion at the same time the CO is released. If there is no odor, however, that does not mean CO is not present.