



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM LAW

The City of Philadelphia recently passed an ordinance requiring owners of all one- and two-family dwellings and small residential care/assisted living facilities (also known as board and care facilities) to install carbon monoxide (CO) detection and alarm devices (CO alarms) in their buildings. Below is information on CO and the requirements of the new law.

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE?

Carbon monoxide is a highly toxic invisible gas. It is the product of the incomplete combustion (burning) of wood and fossil fuels such as home heating fuel oil, natural gas, gasoline, kerosene and coal. Major sources of CO in homes are from fuel burning (not electric) heaters, water heaters, fireplaces, wood burning stoves, gas clothing dryers and a vehicle running in a closed garage. When these appliances are not properly maintained or properly vented to a chimney, CO can build up in a building. Carbon monoxide is very dangerous because it is a colorless, odorless, tasteless and non-irritating gas. Breathing CO (resulting in CO poisoning) is harmful and can be fatal. The warning signs of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath and nausea.

WHAT DOES THE NEW CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM LAW REQUIRE?

The Philadelphia Fire Code, along with the Philadelphia Building, Existing Buildings, and Residential Codes, requires the installation of CO alarms in all new and existing one- and two-family homes and residential care/assisted living facilities with not more than 16 residents, excluding staff.

WHEN MUST CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS BE INSTALLED?

Enforcement of the CO alarm law will occur on January 1, 2009.

WHAT TYPES OF CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS ARE REQUIRED?

Carbon monoxide alarms must bear the label of a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) indicating that it is appropriate for its intended use. For existing buildings, CO alarms can be battery powered or the electrical type that plug into an electrical outlet. New buildings must have CO alarms that are hard-wired to an un-switched circuit of the building's electrical system and must be provided with battery back-up in case of power interruption. There are different models of CO alarms. The base model has detection and alarm devices. Other models also have a digital message display that indicates the parts per million of CO when the alarm activates. Any of the models are appropriate for installation. The installation of a combination smoke and CO alarm is permitted.

WHERE SHOULD CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS BE INSTALLED?

Carbon monoxide alarms are required to be installed within 15 feet of the entrance of every bedroom or within 15 feet of a bed in sleeping areas where there is no enclosed bedroom. The alarms can be installed on walls or ceilings (CO is approximately the same density as air) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Combination smoke and CO alarms must be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions for smoke alarms. CO alarms should not be placed in areas likely to be damaged by children or pets.

WHERE CAN CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS BE PURCHASED?

Carbon monoxide alarms can be purchased at hardware, home improvement, large retail stores (department stores) and some supermarkets.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IF A CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM ACTIVATES?

If a CO alarm activates, remove every one from the house.

If you know which unit is causing the problem, open windows, shut off the fuel supply to the unit and call a service company to have the unit repaired.

If you do not know the cause of the activation of the alarm, remove everyone from the house and call the Fire Department (911).

QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE CARBON MONOXIDE LAW

For general questions regarding the CO alarm law, call the city's informational call center at 311.

For questions regarding enforcement of the CO alarm law call the Department of Licenses and Inspections' Housing Code Enforcement Unit at:

East Philadelphia Office	- 215-685-3762.
North Philadelphia Office	- 215-685-3749.
Northeast Philadelphia Office	- 215-685-3775.
South Philadelphia Office	- 215-685-3756.
West Philadelphia Office	- 215-685-3768.