



Carbon Monoxide Alarm Requirements in Existing Residential Occupancies

This bulletin provides information on the carbon monoxide alarm requirements in existing residential occupancies.

Definitions

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that cannot be seen or smelled. It is a bi-product of combustion, produced by common equipment like fuel-burning appliances, fireplaces and vehicles. In high concentrations it can cause illness and death. Common causes of CO poisoning are the indoor use of charcoal or gas grills, and running generators in garages or near air intakes.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Historical Background

Following a 2006 windstorm and extended power outage in the Puget Sound region, 250 people were treated for CO poisoning and eight died. The cause was either burning charcoal briquettes inside their homes or from the improper use of gasoline-powered generators. In response to these tragedies, new state-wide law and building codes require CO alarms in most residential buildings, including single family homes.

2. All New and Existing Apartments and Rental Houses

State law requires all covered residential units to have CO alarms installed by January 1, 2013.

3. Owner-Occupied Single Family-Family Homes

New homes must include CO alarms.

Existing owner occupied homes are exempt from the January 1, 2013 deadline, but they are still required to include CO alarms in any building permit application for interior remodeling. When the house is sold, state law also requires that CO alarms be installed before the new owner takes occupancy.

4. Hotels, Dorms and Institutions

Sleeping rooms in hotels, motels, dormitories, DSHS-licensed boarding homes and residential treatment facilities do not require CO alarms if the sleeping rooms are properly isolated from any fireplace, fuel-burning appliance or attached garage, and if there are CO alarms in the building's common areas. If these units contain or are connected in some manner to fireplaces, fuel-burning appliances (gas furnace, water heater, range) or attached garages, this exception would not apply.

5. Installation

CO alarms should be installed in the area immediately outside of each bedroom, with at least one alarm for each floor of the dwelling. Models are available that run entirely on batteries or that plug-in with battery backup. Combination smoke alarm/CO alarm units is also available. All CO alarms shall and be UL-2034 compliant, and be installed in accordance with the code and manufacturer's instructions.

6. Further Information

Read the full text of the state law at:

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=19.27.530>

Revisions are located on the State Building Code Council web site at:

<https://fortress.wa.gov/ga/apps/sbcc/Page.aspx?nid=168>
