

# Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services :: Questions and Answers

## Carbon Monoxide Alarm Questions and Answers

Please be advised that the Chief Fire Official has the authority to enforce the Fire Code within his or her jurisdiction and should be contacted prior to implementing any opinion expressed in the following information.

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### Carbon Monoxide (CO) Properties

#### 1. How is CO generated in the home?

CO is a by-product of incomplete combustion of fuel such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, kerosene, coal, charcoal, gasoline, wood, or other bio-fuels. This incomplete combustion can occur in any device that depends on burning a fuel for energy or heat.

Examples of fuel burning devices:

- Home furnace
- Space heater
- Decorative fireplace
- Wood stove
- Kitchen stove or grill
- Gas/charcoal barbeque
- Hot water heater
- Automobile
- Lawnmower

Automobiles left running in an attached garage, a portable generator operating near an open window or in the garage, an outdoor gas barbecue operated inside the house, a grill or kerosene heater that is not properly vented, or a fireplace chimney that is dirty or plugged may create unsafe levels of CO.

When these devices are properly installed, maintained and vented, the CO produced can be prevented from reaching unsafe levels in the home.

#### 2. What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness, without the elevated

temperature associated with the flu. In severe cases, CO poisoning can cause brain damage and death. The elderly, children and people with heart or respiratory conditions may be particularly sensitive to CO.

It can poison the body quickly in high concentrations, or slowly over long periods of time.

**3. How do CO alarms work?**

CO alarms monitor airborne concentration levels (parts per million) of CO over time, and sound an alarm when harmful levels are present. They are designed to sense low CO concentrations over a long period of time as well as high concentrations over a short period of time.

**4. How expensive are CO alarms?**

CO alarms range in price from approximately \$26 to over \$100 depending on whether they are hard-wired, battery operated or plug-in and whether they have additional features (i.e. battery back-up, digital display, etc.). The average mid-range plug-in/battery back-up model is between \$35 and \$40 per unit.

**5. Why are CO alarms required to be installed adjacent to sleeping areas in the home?**

Proper placement of a CO alarm is important. The CO alarm must be located adjacent to all sleeping areas of the home to increase the likelihood that sleeping occupants will hear the alarm if it goes off.

**6. At what height should CO alarms be installed?**

Unlike smoke, which rises to the ceiling, CO mixes with air. Hence CO alarms may be installed at any height. However, if a combination smoke/CO alarm is used, it must be installed on or near the ceiling as per manufacturer's instructions, to ensure that it can detect smoke effectively.

**7. Do CO alarms sound different from smoke alarms?**

Yes. CO alarms sound different from smoke alarms when they activate. By introducing a new emergency device into the home, it is important that everyone in the household knows the difference between an alarming smoke alarm and an alarming CO alarm.

As well, everyone needs to know the difference between an actual alarm sound versus the low battery or end of life warnings for both their smoke and CO alarms.

Owners should consult their instruction manual to obtain further information on the characteristics of the audible signals for each device.

**8. If your CO alarm sounds, and you or other occupants suffer from symptoms of CO poisoning, what should you do?**

Immediately have everyone in the home move outdoors and then call 911 or your local emergency services number from outside the building.

**9. If your CO alarm sounds, and no one is suffering from symptoms of CO poisoning, what should you do?**

Check to see if the battery needs replacing, or the alarm has reached its "end of life" before calling 911.

## **General Ontario Fire Code (OFC) and Ontario Building Code (OBC)**

### **10. Why is the Ontario Fire Code (OFC) being amended?**

OFC changes relating to CO alarms are part of the implementation of the Hawkins Gignac Act, 2013, which received Royal Assent in December 2013. This Act amended the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 (FPPA) to allow the regulation of CO alarms through amendments to the OFC. The Act also proclaims the week beginning November 1 as Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week.

### **11. What is the relationship between the OFC and OBC (Ontario Building Code) with respect to CO alarm requirements?**

The OBC and OFC are companion regulations adopted by Ontario as uniform minimum mandatory standards for building construction and fire/life safety. New construction, renovations and building change of use are regulated by the OBC. Existing buildings are regulated by the OFC, to maintain OBC provisions and/or for retrofit requirements. The CO alarm requirements in the OFC were developed to not exceed existing OBC requirements.

### **12. Do all newly constructed residential buildings require the installation of a CO alarm?**

Yes. Under the OBC, CO alarms have been mandatory in new residential buildings containing a fuel-burning appliance (e.g. a gas furnace/stove) or a storage garage (for motor vehicles) since 2001. Until these OFC amendments, there were no provincial requirements for CO alarms in properties built before 2001. However, many municipalities have required these devices through municipal by-laws.

## **Compliance Schedule**

### **13. When did the CO alarm regulation come into force?**

The CO alarm regulation came into force on October 15, 2014. Buildings that contain no more than six suites of residential occupancy are required to comply with the installation and replacement requirements within 6 months of the in-force date (April 15, 2015, at the latest).

Buildings that contain more than six suites of residential occupancy are required to comply with the installation and replacement requirements within 12 months of the in-force date (October 15, 2015, at the latest).

The maintenance and testing requirements for existing CO alarms (e.g. those devices previously installed to comply with the OBC or a municipal by-law) take effect on the in-force date (October 15, 2014).

[Div. B, 2.16.1.1.(2), 6.3.4.7.(2)]

### **14. Why are there 6 and 12 month phase-in periods for CO alarm installation and replacement?**

The two phase-in periods for the installation and replacement of CO alarms recognizes the impact of the requirement on different size buildings.

The 6 month phase-in period for smaller residential properties considers the incidental cost and time associated with owners purchasing and installing CO alarms.

The 12 month phase-in period provides building owners, property managers and landlords of larger residential properties additional time to plan for, procure and install CO alarms.

**15. Do the 6 and 12 month phase-in periods apply to CO alarm maintenance and testing?**

No. The maintenance and testing requirements take effect on October 15, 2014, the effective date of the regulation.

## **Application**

**16. Do all existing residential buildings require CO alarms?**

Existing residential occupancies that contain at least one fuel-burning appliance (e.g., gas water heater or gas furnace), fireplace or an attached garage, require the installation of a CO alarm.

[Div. B, 2.16.1.1.(1)]

**17. Are CO alarms required in non-residential buildings (i.e. care, care and treatment facilities, daycare centres, etc.)?**

The OBC and the OFC currently require CO alarms in residential occupancies only. Other regulations, such as those under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, may require CO concentrations to not exceed specified levels so as to ensure a safe work place. In these circumstances, it is advisable to consult with the Ministry of Labour on specific requirements.

[Div. B, 2.16.1.1.(1)]

**18. What are examples of residential buildings to which this CO alarm regulation applies?**

The following are examples of residential buildings:

- Houses (detached, semi-detached, attached)
- Rental Apartments/Condominiums
- Residential Group Homes (adults, youth, children)
- Hostels/Domiciliary Hostels
- Social Housing
- Student Residences/Dormitories
- Retirement Homes (classified as residential occupancies)
- Camps for Housing Workers
- Boarding, Lodging, Rooming and Halfway Houses
- Convents/Monasteries
- Clubs (residential)
- Hotels/Motels
- Open and semi-secure detention for Youth
- Recreational Camps
- Residential Schools
- Shelters (homeless/women)

**19. Does the OFC require CO visual alarms for people who are deaf or hearing impaired?**

No. This maintains consistency with OBC requirements.

Although CO visual alarms are not mandatory, people who are deaf or hearing impaired are encouraged to install supplemental warning devices that can be connected to their CO alarm(s). Supplemental devices available on the market include strobe lights and motorized bed shakers.

## **Responsibilities**

### **20. Who is responsible for installing CO alarms in rental dwelling units?**

The landlord of the building is responsible for the installation of the CO alarms.

[Div. B, 2.16.1.2.]

### **21. Who is responsible for maintaining CO alarms in rental dwelling units?**

The landlord is responsible for the maintenance of CO alarms. The landlord is also responsible for providing the tenant with CO alarm maintenance instructions.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.2., 6.3.4.4.]

### **22. Who is responsible for installing CO alarms in boarding, lodging and rooming houses?**

The landlord is responsible for the installation of the CO alarms.

[Div. B, 2.16.1.2.]

### **23. Who is responsible for maintaining CO alarms in boarding, lodging and rooming houses?**

The landlord is responsible for the maintenance of CO alarms. The landlord is also responsible for providing the tenant with CO alarm maintenance instructions.

### **24. Who is responsible for the installation and maintenance of CO alarms in residential condominium suites?**

The owner of the condominium suite is responsible for the installation and maintenance of CO alarms in the suite. Often, there are agreements between the owner and the condominium corporation in which the corporation takes on this responsibility on behalf of the owner.

In a situation where the condominium owner rents out the suite to a tenant, the owner takes on the role of the landlord and is responsible for the installation and maintenance of the CO alarms. Again, there are often agreements between the owner/landlord and the condominium corporation, in which the corporation takes on this responsibility on behalf of the owner/landlord.

[Div. B, 2.16.1.2., 6.3.4.2.]

### **25. What responsibilities do tenants have under the CO alarm regulation?**

Tenants are responsible for notifying the landlord as soon as they become aware that a CO alarm in their unit is disconnected, not operating, or its operation is impaired. Also, tenants may not disable their CO alarms.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.5., 6.3.4.6]

## Installation

### 26. When are CO alarms required to be installed within a house?

If the house contains a fuel burning appliance, fireplace or an attached garage, a CO alarm is required to be installed adjacent to each sleeping area in the house.

For optimum protection, it is recommended that additional CO alarm(s) be installed in other levels and/or areas of the home that are in proximity to a CO source, subject to the distance limits provided in the product's instruction manual.

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.]

### 27. What does adjacent to each sleeping area mean in terms of installation location?

In general, this phrase means the hallway serving or area outside the sleeping area. For instance, a CO alarm must be installed in the hallway adjacent to multiple bedrooms in a house or apartment.

However, there may be situations where "adjacent to each sleeping area" refers to the area around the bed, within the bedroom or sleeping area itself.

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.]

### 28. When are CO alarms required to be installed within an apartment building?

If a fuel-burning appliance or a fireplace is installed in the apartment suite, a CO alarm is required to be installed adjacent to each sleeping area within the suite.

If an apartment suite shares a common wall or floor/ceiling assembly with a garage, a CO alarm is required to be installed adjacent to each sleeping area within the suite.

If an apartment suite shares a common wall or floor/ceiling assembly with a service room containing a fuel-burning appliance, a CO alarm is required to be installed adjacent to each sleeping area within the suite.

If the apartment building's service room contains a fuel-burning appliance, a CO alarm is required to be installed in the service room.

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.]

### 29. If an apartment suite has a fuel burning appliance, do neighbouring suites that share either a common wall or floor ceiling assembly require a CO alarm?

No. This maintains consistency with OBC requirements.

### 30. Does an apartment suite that is located across the corridor from a service room containing a fuel-burning appliance require a CO alarm?

No. This maintains consistency with OBC requirements.

### 31. If an apartment suite has no fuel burning appliance, but has concealed spaces that contain ducts servicing fuel fire appliances located outside of the suite, does the suite require a CO alarm?

No. This maintains consistency with OBC requirements.

## CO Alarm Standards

**32. What standards apply to CO alarms?**

There are two industry standards referenced under the OFC and OBC, namely CSA-6.19-01, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices" and UL 2034-2008, "Single and Multiple Station Carbon Monoxide Detectors".

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.(5)]

**33. Are CO alarms required to have a secondary power source (i.e. battery) in the event of a power failure?**

No, this maintains consistency with the OBC.

However, for optimum protection, it is recommended that consumers choosing to install hard wired or plug-in type CO alarms, purchase units that include a secondary power source.

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.(5)]

**34. Can CO alarms that are designed to be placed (i.e. not permanently secured) on a surface permitted?**

Yes. Battery operated CO alarms that can be placed on a surface are acceptable as long as they are in compliance with CSA-6.19-01, "Residential Carbon Monoxide Alarming Devices" or UL 2034-2008, "Single and Multiple Station Carbon Monoxide Detectors".

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.(5)]

**35. Can combination smoke CO alarms be installed?**

Yes. Combination smoke/CO alarms that are in compliance with the appropriate smoke alarm and CO alarm standards referenced in the OFC can be installed.

[Div. B, 2.16.2.1.(5)]

**Replacement****36. How often are CO alarms required to be replaced?**

CO alarms are required to be replaced within the timeframe indicated in the manufacturer's instructions and/or on the label on the unit.

CO alarm sensors can deteriorate and lose sensitivity over time due to environmental conditions.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.7.(3)]

**37. What is the significance of the August 6, 2001 construction date referenced in the replacement requirements under OFC Division B, Sentences 6. . . .( ) and ( )?**

August 6, 2001 is the date when current CO alarm installation requirements were introduced in the OBC for the construction of new residential buildings.

**Testing****38. How often are CO alarms required to be tested?**

In a rental dwelling unit, the landlord must test CO alarms annually, after the battery is replaced and after every change in tenancy.

The landlord must also test CO alarms that are connected to an electrical circuit after any change is made to the electrical circuit.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.8]

**39. How is a CO alarm tested?**

A CO alarm is tested by activating the test feature as described in the manufacturer's maintenance instructions.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.8.(5)]

**40. Are landlord records of CO alarm testing required?**

Yes. As per the requirement of Sentence 1.1.2.1.(1) of Division B, records of tests are to be retained at the building premises for examination by the Chief Fire Official.

[Div. B, 6.3.4.2, 1.1.2.1.(1)]

## **enforcement**

**41. What is the impact of the CO alarm regulation on existing municipal CO alarm by-laws?**

Section 79 of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, states that the OFC supersedes all municipal by-laws related to the presence of unsafe levels of CO.

CO alarms that were installed to meet a municipal by-law must be maintained in accordance with the OFC effective October 15, 2014.

**42. If I don't comply with the OFC, can I be charged?**

Yes. Once the compliance dates for CO alarms have passed, anyone found to be in contravention of these requirements can be charged and if convicted would be subject to penalties.

**43. Is there a Part I ticketable offence for CO alarm violations?**

The ministry is developing new short form wording to increase the number of ticketable offences under the Provincial Offences Act for a number of Fire Code violations, including those relating to CO alarms.

**44. When the new Part I ticketable offences are enacted, will the set fine and total payable be the same as the current Part I OFC offences?**

The set fines are currently under consideration.

**45. Does that mean I cannot be charged until such time as the CO alarm violations can be prosecuted by a Part I ticket process?**

No. There are penalties under the FPPA for individuals who are convicted for not complying with the OFC. The process for prosecuting the CO alarm violations would require the issuance of a Part III Information pursuant to the Provincial Offences Act. This process requires the defendant to be served with a summons.

**16. If convicted under Part III of the Provincial Offences Act, would the penalty be the same as a Part I offence?**

No. Failure to comply with the OFC could result in a fine of up to \$50,000 and/or imprisonment for up to one year for individuals or \$100,000 for corporations.

**17. Can a fire department serve an Inspection Order under Section 21(1) of the FPPA to address a CO alarm related Fire Code violation in the building?**

Yes. Since the definition of "fire safety" under the FPPA has been revised to address "unsafe levels of carbon monoxide", CO alarm related OFC violations can be addressed through an Inspection Order.

**18. Can a fire department use the Immediate Threat to life provisions under Section 15 of the FPPA to alleviate a CO alarm related hazard in the building?**

No. Section 15 of the FPPA only applies when there are reasonable grounds to believe that a risk of fire poses an immediate threat to life.

### **Other**

**19. Do CO alarms need to be addressed in a fire safety plan?**

Although CO alarms do not specifically fall within the scope of Subsection 2.8.2., it would be a good practice to include in the fire safety plan their maintenance requirements and any special procedures to follow should the CO alarm sound.

[Div. B, 2.8.2]

