



Carbon Monoxide Alarm Requirements in Existing Residential Occupancies

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that cannot be seen or smelled. It can cause illness and death in some situations, particularly within enclosed indoor areas. Carbon monoxide is produced by fuel-burning appliances, fireplaces and vehicles. The most common causes of CO poisoning are the indoor use of charcoal or gas grills, as well as the running of generators in garages or near air intakes.

Requirements

As of January 1, 2013 carbon monoxide (CO) alarms will be required in all residential dwelling units. This applies even for dwellings that don't have fireplaces or gas-fired appliances, because these are not the cause of the most severe incidents. Following a 2006 windstorm, 250 people were treated for carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning in the Puget Sound area and eight died, all from either burning charcoal briquettes inside their homes or from 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.

All New and Existing Apartments and Rental Houses: State law requires all covered residential units to have CO alarms installed by New Year's Day, 2013.

Owner-Occupied Single Family Homes: New homes must include CO alarms. Existing owner-occupied homes are exempt from the January 1 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.

Hotel, 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.

Installation

CO alarms should be installed in the area outside of each bedroom, with at least one alarm for each floor of the dwelling. Follow manufacturer's guidelines on proper installation. They may be purchased at local hardware and home improvement stores. Models are available that run entirely on batteries or that plug-in with battery backup. Combination smoke alarm/CO alarm units are also available. All units should be UL-2034 compliant.

Further Information

These new code provisions were developed with input from medical professionals, building operators, engineers and other experts to effectively prevent carbon monoxide poisonings while minimizing cost and disruption to owners and tenants. As all homes and apartments are fitted with CO alarms, the frequency of carbon monoxide poisonings in our community should decrease dramatically.

Links to these revisions are located on the State Building Code Council web site at:

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

Read the full text of the state law at:

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