

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING – THE SILENT KILLER

Even though first responders are trained to understand the dangers of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning and to recognize potential signs and symptoms, CO poisoning can go unrecognized and untreated, leading to short-term risk and long-term health problems.

Know the facts about CO poisoning

CO poisoning can be difficult to detect.

CO poisoning can present with flu-like symptoms, but it is also possible to be poisoned without having any symptoms at all. 1

CO poisoning puts firefighters at significant risk at the scene of a fire and in EMS first in or other emergency response.

Even mild CO poisoning causes mental confusion, which can lead to poor decision making, putting both the exposed firefighter and EMS Patients at risk.4

Mild CO poisoning can also rob the heart and brain of oxygen – nearly 50% of line of duty firefighter deaths are attributed to heart disease or stroke.3 That's why new NFPA 1584 rehab standards support the use of on-scene CO testing.4 That's also why so many departments are carrying personal CO monitors on every "first in" response.

CO poisoning significantly increases long-term health risks.

Just one severe CO poisoning almost doubles the risk of premature death.8 Consistent exposure to CO poisoning may cause long term heart and brain damage.6

What you can do to protect yourself

Carry a portable monitor into every first response to protect yourself and to know when to test your EMS patient for CO.

Wear your mask and carry a portable CO monitor in overhaul.

Test for carbon monoxide in the blood with an approved noninvasive device.

1. Hampson NB et al. American Journal of Emergency Medicine. 26:665-669, 2008
2. Jakubowski G. FireRescue Magazine. 22(11):52-55, 2004
3. Bledsoe BE. FireRescue Magazine. September 2005
4. NFPA 1584: Standards on the Rehabilitation Process for Members During Emergency Operations and Training Exercises. Annex A section A.6.2.4(1)
5. Hampson NB et al. Crit Care Med. 2009; 37(6): 1941-47
6. Bledsoe BE. Journal of Emergency Medical Services. 32:54-59, 2007

Much of the above information was obtained from the website <http://thesilentkiller.net/co-poisoning-facts.html> and includes recommendations for portable monitoring by Airspace Monitoring Systems, Inc.