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Carbon Monoxide (CO) Pollution in Outdoor Air

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Basic Information about Carbon Monoxide (CO) Outdoor Air Pollution

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What is CO?

CO is a colorless, odorless gas that can be harmful when inhaled in large amounts. CO is released when something is burned. The greatest sources of CO to outdoor air are cars, trucks and other vehicles or machinery that burn fossil fuels. A variety of items in your home such as unvented kerosene and gas space heaters, leaking chimneys and furnaces, and gas stoves also release CO and can affect air quality indoors.

- Learn more about [CO's impact on indoor air quality](#).

What are the harmful effects of CO?

Breathing air with a high concentration of CO reduces the amount of oxygen that can be transported in the blood stream to critical organs like the heart and brain.

At very high levels, which are possible indoors or in other enclosed environments, CO can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and death.

Very high levels of CO are not likely to occur outdoors. However, when CO levels are elevated outdoors, they can be of particular concern for people with some types of heart disease. These people already have a reduced ability for getting oxygenated blood to their hearts in situations where the heart needs more oxygen than usual. They are especially vulnerable to the effects of CO when exercising or under increased stress. In these situations, short-term exposure to elevated CO may result in reduced oxygen to the heart accompanied by chest pain also known as angina.

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What is being done about CO pollution?

Under the Clean Air Act, EPA sets and reviews standards for CO in outdoor air.

- [Setting and Reviewing Standards to Control CO Pollution](#)

EPA standards and data help state, tribal and local agencies to make sure that CO is kept at a safe level.

- [Learn about how air quality standards help reduce CO](#)

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LAST UPDATED ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2016