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Carbon Monoxide – “The Silent Killer”

All fuels, even diesel and “cleaner” fuels such as propane, create carbon monoxide. This gas is a common byproduct of any combustion process.

Carbon monoxide is an invisible gas with no taste or smell. It is especially dangerous if it builds up indoors. It is just slightly lighter than air, so it can hang around in enclosed spaces.

A masonry contractors’ employee was working at a large, enclosed construction site. The site did not have enough ventilation for the three machines giving off carbon monoxide: a portable mixer and a trowel powered by gasoline, and a forklift powered by propane.

The employee died of carbon monoxide poisoning after he and six other workers were exposed to high levels of the gas.

- What caused this incident ?
- How could this have been prevented ?
- Have you ever become sick from carbon monoxide ?

Remember This

- Never use any equipment powered by an internal combustion engine (such as a generator or pressure washer) indoors or in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage, crawl space, or basement.

- Before you start work, identify all potential sources of carbon monoxide exposure.
- Use electric tools or tools with separate engines that can be kept outside, away from air intakes.
- Tune and maintain engines and equipment regularly.
- Wear a carbon monoxide monitor, which employers should provide if there is a high potential of exposure to carbon monoxide. The monitor sounds an alarm when gas levels become unsafe.
- Watch for warning signs of carbon monoxide exposure: headache, faintness, dizziness, confusion, nausea, and irregular heartbeat.
- Do not ignore the warning signs in yourself or others near the fuel-burning equipment. Turn off the equipment, go outdoors, and call 911 for medical help.