

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that cannot be seen or smelled and can kill a person in minutes. Carbon monoxide can quickly build up to unsafe levels in enclosed or semi-enclosed areas. Many Washington state residents have been treated for or have even died from CO poisoning in the last several decades. Generators in garages, or near air intakes, and use of charcoal or gas grilles indoors, are common causes of CO poisoning during power outages. Malfunctioning or poorly maintained fuel burning appliances, attached garages, and fireplaces are also sources of CO.

Beginning January 1, 2011, state law required CO alarms to be installed in all new single family homes, as well as new apartments, condominiums, hotels and motels.

State law requires CO alarms to be installed in existing apartments, condominiums, hotels, motels and single family residences by January 1, 2013. An exemption to this is that owner-occupied single family residences, legally occupied before July 26, 2009, are not required to have CO alarms until they are sold (see [RCW 19.27.530](#)), or when they undergo work requiring a building permit, as laid out below.

For single family residences and duplexes, construction and alterations are regulated by the International Residential Code (IRC), as amended by Washington State. Section R315 of the IRC reads as follows:

R315.1 Carbon Monoxide Alarms. For new construction, an approved carbon monoxide alarm shall be installed outside of each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of the bedrooms in dwelling units and on each level of the dwelling and in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

R315.2 Existing Dwellings. Existing dwellings shall be equipped with carbon monoxide alarms when alterations, repairs or additions requiring a permit occur, or when one or more sleeping rooms are added or created.

EXCEPTIONS 1. Work involving the exterior surfaces of dwellings, such as the replacement of roofing or siding, or the addition or replacement of windows or doors, or the addition of a porch or deck, or electrical permits, are exempt from the requirements of this section.

2. Installation, alteration or repairs of noncombustion plumbing or mechanical systems are exempt from the requirements of this section. (Editor's note – this means that the change-out of gas water heaters and furnaces will require CO alarm installation.)

R315.3 Alarm Requirements. Single station carbon monoxide alarms shall be listed as complying with UL 2034 and shall be installed in accordance with this code (IRC) and the manufacturer's installation instructions.

Please call your local building department for more information.