



FROM THE AIR PROGRAM

Burning wood? Carbon monoxide detectors.

Chances are you've already got your wood stove fired up a few times this season. With the temps dropping and longer night time hours, we can expect an increase in wood burning on the reservation and all residential areas in the Owens Valley. **This is a good time to make sure you have a working CO detector in your home. If you have any combustion devices in your home and any people living in it, you are a good candidate for a working CO detector!**

CO (carbon monoxide) is a byproduct of incomplete combustion of wood that can reach lethal concentrations if accumulated indoors, especially when residents want to keep the windows and doors closed to keep heat in. **CO is colorless and odorless**, and not so easily detected as billows of smoke coming from the stove vents or when the doors are opened before or after the fire is very hot. **CO is also a byproduct of heating with portable kerosene or gas heaters, improperly vented kitchen ranges and furnaces, leaky forced-air ducting, grills, and portable generators.** CO poisoning occurs as CO robs the body of oxygen. It has a variety of symptoms because it is affecting many organs including the brain. The most common symptoms are headache, dizziness, shortness of breath, red lips and cheeks, rapid heartbeat, and nausea, but then more advanced symptoms can onset as a victim loses consciousness or asphyxiates.

CO detectors work by passively contacting air; measuring and calculating concentrations of CO gas, and signaling dangerous levels via an audible alarm. They are pre-programmed to alarm when levels are dangerous, so that anyone indoors can take action to protect themselves. It's important to remember that although CO can be present for any length of time before a detector alarms, it will only alarm when the programmed level is reached. In other words, it does not alarm as soon as there is any CO. A CO monitor is different in that it records CO levels while you have it running, and you can watch the levels change, and compare the data with other similar recordings. Detectors can also be monitors but are not operable for that purpose— they are designed to alert people to exit buildings. The Air Program operates a portable CO monitor (NOT an alarm detector) that can be used for indoor diagnostics and statistical reports. This service is available to residents who have working CO monitors installed for wood-burning, and in nonresidential buildings on the reservation as-needed basis; contact the Air Program at 760-784-9308.

The best way to tell if your CO monitor is working is to know that you installed it within the last couple of years; also, consult the directions; there is often a test button/function. Most manufacturers specify a **working lifetime of 5 years for a CO detector**. Keep in mind that exposure of the sensor to high levels of CO can shorten this. It could be longer or shorter, but manufacturers don't know how much exposure the sensors will get once installed. Check the packaging on your detector. Also read the booklet or any information that comes with your CO detector as it will instruct you in where and how to install it. If you don't still have the directions, booklet or packaging it and/or it has been a few years and, consider getting a new detector. You can get one at a hardware store or home store. If you have any doubts about the operability of your detector, replace it and/or ask the manufacturer or call the Air Program. If you would like help understanding the directions/booklet for your detector, also call the Air Program.