

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

Carbon Monoxide Alarm Requirements in Residential Occupancies

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Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that cannot be seen or smelled. It can cause illness and death in some situations, particularly within enclosed indoor areas. Carbon monoxide is produced by fuel-burning appliances, fireplaces and vehicles. The most common causes of CO poisoning are the indoor use of charcoal or gas grills, as well as the running of generators in garages or near air intakes.

Following a 2006 windstorm, 250 people were treated for carbon monoxide poisoning in the Puget Sound area and eight died, all from either burning charcoal briquettes inside their homes or from improper use of gasoline-powered generators.

In response to these tragedies, new state-wide law and building codes require CO alarms in residential buildings, including single-family homes.

Code Requirements

All Residential Rental Housing

State law and the Seattle Fire Code require all residential rental units to have CO alarms installed retroactively, including rental homes, apartments, and condominiums. The only exception to this requirement is Residential Group R-2 buildings (this includes apartments and condominiums) when those occupancies do not contain a fuel-burning appliance, fuel-burning fireplace, or an attached garage. State law requires the maintenance of the carbon monoxide alarm, including the replacement of batteries, to be the responsibility of the tenant.

Owner-Occupied Single-Family Homes

New single-family type homes must include CO alarms. Existing owner-occupied homes legally occupied

before July 26, 2009 are exempt, but they are still required to include CO alarms in any building permit application for interior remodeling. When the house is sold, state law also requires that CO alarms be installed before the new owner takes occupancy.

Hotels, Dorms and Institutions

Sleeping rooms in hotels, motels, dormitories, DSHS-licensed boarding homes and residential treatment facilities do not require CO alarms if the sleeping rooms are properly isolated from any fireplace, fuel-burning appliance or attached garage, and if there is a CO alarm detection system in the building's common areas.

Installation

CO alarms should be installed in the area outside of each bedroom, with at least one alarm for each floor of the dwelling. Follow manufacturer's guidelines on proper installation. They may be purchased at local hardware and home improvement stores. Models are available that run entirely on batteries or that plug in with battery backup. Combination smoke alarm/CO alarm units are also available. All units should be UL-2034 compliant.

Further Information

These new code provisions were developed with input from medical professionals, building operators, engineers and other experts to effectively prevent carbon monoxide poisonings while minimizing cost and disruption to owners and tenants. As all homes and apartments become equipped with CO alarms, the frequency of CO poisonings in our community should decrease dramatically.

More information is available on the State Building Code Council web site at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/ga/apps/sbcc/Page.aspx?nid=168>. Read the full text of the state law at: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?>

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