According to the Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 500 people die each year as a result of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and 20,000 end up in hospital emergency rooms. CO is a gas that is both odorless and colorless and hinders the body’s ability to deliver oxygen to the body.

The information below describes the sources of CO, its health effects and symptoms of exposure, and prevention tips to avoid CO poisoning.

**Sources of Carbon Monoxide**
CO is produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon-containing fuels. Examples of such fuels include:

- Fuel oil or gas burned by unvented space heaters.
- Wood, charcoal or natural gas burned by BBQs, woodstoves, or furnaces.
- Natural gas burned by gas stoves, fireplaces, and water heaters.
- Gasoline burned by vehicles with internal combustion engines.

**Symptoms/Health Effects of Exposure**
- CO poisoning can result in headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, confusion, loss of consciousness, and even death.
- CO poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms often mimic the flu or other illnesses. Sleeping or intoxicated individuals can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.
- Fetuses, infants, the elderly, and people with heart and respiratory illnesses are at particularly high risk for CO poisoning.

**What I Can Do...**
- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas in the home.
- Open the flue when a fireplace is being used.
- **DO NOT** use gas ovens, gas ranges, or charcoal grills to heat the home.
- **DO NOT** use unvented gas or kerosene space heaters in enclosed spaces.

**Tips on Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**
- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas in the home.
- Have the gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced frequently.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a BBQ indoors. All burning charcoal emits CO.
- Open flues when fireplaces are in use.
- Do not use gas ovens or gas ranges to heat the home.
- Do not use unvented gas or kerosene space heaters in enclosed spaces.
- Do not leave a car or lawn mower engine running in any enclosed space.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: What to Do**
Don’t ignore symptoms, especially if more than one person is feeling them. If you think you are suffering from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning: Get fresh air immediately, open doors and windows, turn off combustion appliances, and leave the house. Go to an emergency room. Be sure to tell the physician that you suspect CO poisoning.

**References**
California Health and Safety Code, Section 13261, Carbon Monoxide Prevention Act of 2010
http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=hsc&group=13001-14000&file=13260-13263

Hayfork Fire Department