

Carbon Monoxide: Keep Exhaust Out of the Work

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Why this matters

Carbon monoxide cannot be detected by smell. Combustion equipment can contaminate enclosed or partly enclosed work areas, and exhaust outside can enter through openings or air intakes.

Objective: Identify exhaust exposure paths and verify the prevention and response plan.

Key hazards or failure points

Indoor gasoline tools; exhaust entering occupied areas; ineffective ventilation; unsuitable monitoring; symptoms mistaken for fatigue; unprotected rescue.

Practical controls

- Use suitable noncombustion equipment where feasible and assess its hazards. Do not use gasoline-powered tools or generators inside enclosed or partly enclosed areas.
- Keep outdoor combustion sources where exhaust cannot enter occupied spaces. Have the responsible technical person assess source placement, exposure controls and monitoring needs.
- Establish alarms, fresh-air escape and emergency help. Do not assume a dust mask, open doorway, household alarm or automatic engine shutoff makes an unsafe setup acceptable.

Verify It in the Field

Identify all combustion sources, including other crews' equipment. Trace potential exhaust paths from a safe location and compare placement with the assessed plan and instructions.

The responsible person verifies required monitoring: suitable instrument, specified checks, locations and action criteria. Record the actual result and time. A running fan or absence of symptoms does not prove safe air.

Confirm everyone recognizes the alarm and knows the unobstructed fresh-air route and emergency call method. Resolve how safe reentry will be established; do not stage an exposure test.

Stop and reassess

For an alarm or suspected poisoning, leave promptly to fresh air and summon emergency medical help. Do not delay escape to locate or shut down the source. Stay out of the affected area; do not attempt unprotected rescue. Reentry requires authorized assessment and verified safe conditions.

Ask the crew

1. Where could exhaust enter our work area?
2. Who verifies the monitoring and action criteria?
3. Where do we go and how do we get emergency help?

Exposure-prevention briefing; not respirator selection or rescue training.

Sources: NIOSH workplace carbon monoxide guidance; CDC CO basics.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/carbon-monoxide-combustion-equipment