



3901 Liberty Street Road • Aurora, Illinois 60504-8122
Telephone: 630.851.7330 • Fax: 630.851.9309

PENNSYLVANIA STRENGTHENS CARBON MONOXIDE PROTECTION WITH NEW LEGISLATION

Nearly All Multi-Unit Residential Buildings Must Feature CO Alarms by June 2015

by Deborah Hanson, director of external affairs, BRK Brands, Inc.

Pennsylvania is resolving to breathe easier, thanks to new measures for carbon monoxide protection recently enacted statewide. As you know from information you've received from the PROA, the Carbon Monoxide Alarm Standards Act (Senate Bill 607) – which was signed into law in December 2013 – requires owners of multi-family dwellings to install CO alarms in every unit of their properties by June 2015.

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous – and potentially fatal – gas that can only be detected by specially designed sensing devices. The new legislation will help put an end to the tragic incidents that occur each year as a result of undetected carbon monoxide.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, Pennsylvania leads the nation in the number of accidental CO poisoning incidents, as one of the few cold-weather states without previously enacted CO safety legislation. The Carbon Monoxide Alarm Standards Act brings the Keystone State in line with dozens of other states that have laws to help protect people from CO poisoning.

Under the new law, owners of multi-family dwellings – defined as buildings with more than two units – are required to install, repair, maintain and test CO devices in each of their properties' units prior to their lease. Once the unit is occupied, the tenant is responsible for the upkeep of the alarm and replacement of batteries. The law applies to all multi-family residences that contain carbon monoxide sources or are situated within structures that contain one or more sources of this poisonous gas.

CO sources may include, but are not limited to, heaters, fireplaces, furnaces, appliances or cooking sources using coal, wood, petroleum products or other fuels emitting CO as a by-product of combustion. Structures containing attached garages with doors, ductwork or ventilation shafts connected to a living space must also feature CO alarms.

Known as the "silent killer," CO poisoning is the number one cause of accidental poisoning in the United States – responsible for an average of 450 deaths and more than 20,000 emergency room visits each year. CO poisoning is notoriously difficult to diagnose – often until it's too late. The symptoms mimic those of many other illnesses and can include nausea, headaches, dizziness, weakness, chest pain and vomiting. In more severe poisoning cases, people may experience disorientation or unconsciousness, or suffer long-term neurological disabilities, cardiorespiratory failure or death.

According to the law, CO alarms must be centrally located and near a unit's bedrooms and fossil-fuel burning heater or fireplace. Always follow manufacturer's instructions when installing an alarm.

The NFPA also recommends replacing alarms once they reach the end of the manufacturer's suggested useful life or expiration date – an average of five to seven years. The Pennsylvania law gives flexibility to the types of alarms that are allowed, as well as the power source – battery powered, plug-in, and hardwired alarms with battery backup all are allowed under this law. One

option that is fairly new to the market are alarms that are powered by a 10-year sealed battery, which is the longest useful life of any CO alarm. These alarms offer hassle-free protection with a tamper-resistant battery that powers the alarm for 10 years. Because the battery cannot be removed, tenants are not able to deactivate the alarm.

For building owners who already have alarms but may not know their age or condition, this new legislation serves as a reminder to update their properties accordingly. First Alert also offers the below additional CO alarm guidelines for property managers and building owners to know and share with their tenants:

- Always refer to and follow manufacturer's instructions to install alarms.
- Keep CO alarms clear of all dust and debris. Never paint over them.
- Ensure that alarms are plugged all the way into the outlet or, if battery operated, have working batteries installed. Do not install in an outlet that is controlled by a switch.
- Check or replace batteries when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Test alarms once per month to ensure they are in working order.
- Make certain each person can hear the CO alarm sound from his or her sleeping room and that the sound is loud enough to awaken everyone.
- Make sure alarms are installed at least 15 feet away from sources of CO to reduce the chance of false alarms.

As you know, the Carbon Monoxide Alarm Standards Act is a vital step in bringing strengthened CO protection to consumers state-wide. But installing CO alarms is only half of the story – conducting ongoing alarm maintenance, including replacing expired alarms and checking batteries, is necessary to maintain occupants' level of protection.

More information about the Carbon Monoxide Alarm Standards Act can be found on the Pennsylvania Legislature website at: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us>.

As the most trusted and recognized brand name in home safety, First Alert is committed to educating the public about the dangers of fire and CO poisoning. For additional information on carbon monoxide safety, as well as a complete home safety checklist, visit http://www.firstalert.com/safety_checklist.php.

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