New carbon monoxide alarm rules in force

By Riley Murphy

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As of January 1, the Ontario Fire Code now requires a working carbon monoxide alarm on every level of any residence with a gas-burning appliance, including a furnace, water heater or stove.

The alarms must be installed adjacent to each sleeping area on every storey of the home, including storeys without sleeping areas.

Previously, a carbon monoxide alarm was required only outside each sleeping area.

Dave Pelayo, Fire Chief of Caledon Fire and Emergency Services, said this change is important as carbon monoxide can build up anywhere in a home and mix freely with air, moving throughout the home by forced air heating.

?Having an alarm on every level increases the chance of early detection, regardless of where the gas originates or where people are spending time,? says Pelayo.

He explains that carbon monoxide is particularly dangerous because it is colourless, odourless, and tasteless; people often don't realize they are being exposed to it.

Symptoms of exposure, he explains, mimic common illnesses like the flu, including headaches, dizziness, nausea, and fatigue, which can delay recognition and response.

?If you are exposed to carbon monoxide at night, you won't recognize symptoms and will be put in a deeper sleep. Prolonged or high-level exposure can lead to confusion, loss of consciousness, long-term health effects, or death, even in otherwise healthy individuals. It can affect you even after you leave the source and you don't need to be exposed to high-levels to be harmed,? says Pelayo.

When residents set out to purchase these alarms, Pelayo tells them to look for carbon monoxide alarms certified by a recognized testing agency, such as the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC), or Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

The alarm should be appropriate for residential use and clearly indicate compliance with Canadian safety standards.

He shares that it's also important to follow the manufacturer's guidance on placement, power source, and lifespan to ensure the alarm functions as intended.

When it comes to the upkeep of the carbon monoxide alarms in your home, they should be tested at least once a month and whenever the batteries are replaced.

Batteries should be changed according to the manufacturer's instructions, or immediately if the low-battery signal sounds.

Pelayo says that most carbon monoxide alarms have a limited lifespan, typically five to ten years, and should be replaced once they reach the end of their service life, even if they appear to be working.

?We recommend that at least one of the carbon monoxide alarms in your home have a digital display or verbal notification option. This will warn you if there is any carbon monoxide present before the alarm is activated,? he adds.