

## Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Neighbors InDeed Answers Your Questions

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BY DOUG BROWN

On July 1 of this year, a new California law goes into effect that's causing quite a stir among homeowners.

Senate Bill 183 requires the placement of carbon monoxide (CO) detectors in all California single-family dwellings. If you're planning to sell your house, you must show the presence of a CO detector when your real estate is transferred. If you own a dwelling unit that you are renting, you must have a CO detector installed in the unit(s).

For Lincoln Hills residents, this new mandate has raised a host of questions, many of which have been asked of Neighbors InDeed Handy Helpers and the Information & Referral volunteers who answer our phones. Here goes.

**Q: WHY MUST I INSTALL YET ONE MORE GIZMO IN MY HOUSE?**

**A:** Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, lethal gas, the byproduct of the combustion of fuel such as natural gas. It's called the "silent killer" because it's difficult to detect (with our normal senses) before it's too late. There are 30 to 40 "avoidable deaths" each year in California stemming from CO poisoning. So, an easily plugged-in "gizmo" is well worth the minor cost, right?

**Q: WHAT KIND OF CO DETECTOR SHOULD I PURCHASE?**

**A:** There are four basic types: 1. AC "plug-in" with backup battery; 2. Battery-only; 3. Hardwired; 4. Combination CO detector and smoke alarm. The first option offers ease of installation and long-term efficiency. You can simply plug it into an available outlet, make sure a back-up battery (in case of a power outage) is snapped into place, and you're done. Battery-only detectors add some convenience because you're not limited to electrical outlets for placement; you'll just have to attach them (with screws) to a wall. Hardwired detectors require potentially costly professional installation, and the combination alarms are impractical in our houses that already have hardwired interconnected smoke alarms.

**Q: HOW MANY SHOULD I INSTALL?**

A: Recommendations vary on this, but for our Lincoln Hills homes, one near each sleeping area is sufficient – so, for our homes, two detectors should be more than adequate. The manufacturers of the detectors would like you to buy one for every room in the house because that sells their product, but consumer research organizations recommend a “minimum of one detector on each sleeping floor.” The key is to detect CO before it reaches bedrooms where you are sleeping.

Q: WHERE SHOULD I “INSTALL” MY CO DETECTOR?

A: Your detector(s) should be placed at least six feet away from stoves, fireplaces, gas dryers, furnaces, and bathrooms, and in a place where air circulation is relatively free. (In other words, not behind a couch, nor sandwiched between two bulky furniture items.) Neighbors InDeed recommends placing them in a hallway or a room adjacent to the bedroom(s) where you sleep.

Q: WHERE CAN I PURCHASE THEM, AND WHAT BRAND?

A: Home maintenance stores (Home Depot, Lowe's, Ace), drugstores, and Internet sites all sell CO detectors. They run anywhere from about \$20 to \$60, and are often on sale. They come in a variety of reliable brands; just make sure that what you purchase is UL listed and avoid what might appear to be a cheap knockoff brand.

Q: WHAT IF I REFUSE TO INSTALL A CO DETECTOR?

A: Some people just don't like the government telling them what they can and can't do, and granted, we don't know of any “CO Detector Police” who will snoop around in your house and throw you in jail if you don't have one! But why avoid spending a few bucks on a simple device that could save your life – or the life of a loved one? And of course, if you plan to sell your house, or you're a landlord, you must install one or risk a fine of about \$200. Ouch!

Q: WILL NEIGHBORS INDEED “INSTALL” CO DETECTORS FOR ME?

A: You don't need a Handy Helper to open a box, activate a battery, and plug it into a socket! It's easy to do! If you get a battery-operated detector, you will need to attach it to a wall with screws, but we don't perform installations that require drilling into walls, so perhaps there's a neighbor or friend who can help you with that!

Q: FURTHER QUESTIONS?

A: Ah, now you're talking. Call Neighbors InDeed at 223-2763 and just ask us!