

KNOWING ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE — The Problems

Carbon monoxide is undetectable to our senses. This colorless, odorless, tasteless gas can accumulate rapidly to lethal levels.

- CO does not float or sink. It mixes evenly with air.
- It enters the bloodstream through the lungs and displaces oxygen the body needs. In short, it asphyxiates victims.
- CO in high concentrations can be fatal in a matter of minutes.
- Calm days present more danger than windy days. Heading into the wind with abundant air means more fresh air moving around in the cockpit. When the air is calm, fumes being pulled back stay there and do not get blown away.
- Marine CO detectors alert people when low levels of CO are present over time.

“Teak Surfing” puts people, usually children, directly in harm’s way.

- Teak surfers hold onto the swim deck while being pulled through the water, putting them directly behind the boat and often right behind exhaust vents.
- Teak surfers often do not wear a PFD (personal flotation device), creating a more dangerous situation.
- If you suspect someone has been exposed to CO poisoning, don’t hesitate to act: get them fresh air, open windows and doors to increase ventilation; turn off boat engine; seek immediate medical attention.
- The Coast Guard and BoatUS Foundation recommend averting such tragedies: avoid activities such as teak, body and drag surfing.

Carbon monoxide, CO, is a silent killer. The US Coast Guard, along with other organizations such as the BoatUS Foundation, are educating people on ways to prevent CO poisoning and protect themselves and others from it.

CO Poisoning Occurs on Many Boats.

CO poisoning can occur on any boat with a gasoline-power generator. Studies show CO emissions can cause harmful and sometimes fatal effects in exposed outside areas.

- Studies show CO poisoning deaths happen also on houseboats with through-transom exhaust systems when the generator is running and exhaust fumes become trapped beneath the swim platform.
- Dangerous, lethal levels of CO can collect in the cavity beneath the swim platforms and above in the stern deck on some houseboats while not underway with the electrical generator running.
- Running gasoline-powered generators to power air conditioning, entertainment centers and galley appliances while anchored or moored can also be harmful.
- CO is heavier than air and will tend to collect in cabin spaces. A boat running with the rear cabin door open may end up filling the cabin with exhaust fumes.
- The best way to avoid CO poisoning is to avoid dangerous areas and turn-off engines when

Know the Symptoms. Carbon monoxide poisoning is often misdiagnosed as seasickness or alcohol intoxication.

- Victims usually are unaware they are affected.
- Early symptoms include irritated eyes, headache, nausea, weakness and dizziness.
- Prolonged exposure to low levels or short exposure to high levels of carbon monoxide can be fatal.
- Know and educate all passengers and where CO can accumulate on your boat. And know how to treat someone who becomes exposed to CO poisoning.