

Boating and Carbon Monoxide Exposure

It's summer and time to head to the lake for skiing, tubing, swimming, fishing, or just going for a ride in the boat. Don't let this time of fun in the sun turn in to a tragedy for you and your family.

We think of carbon monoxide (CO) exposure or poisoning mainly during the winter months when cooler temperatures outside cause us to turn up the heat in our homes. But, carbon monoxide exposure can also occur during the summer months as well, especially at the lake on boats and in marinas. Carbon monoxide can harm and even kill you inside or outside your boat.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas that is produced when a carbon-based fuel such as gasoline, propane, charcoal, or oil burns. Carbon monoxide enters the bloodstream through the lungs and reduces the amount of oxygen carried by the blood to your body. The lack of oxygen results in death.

Carbon monoxide is emitted from any boat's exhaust as well as any generator that is used on the boat. Exposure can occur while a boat is idling in the marina, either from your own boat or other boats where the engine is running. Swimming around the boat, hanging onto the back of the boat, and swimming under pontoon boats can also be areas of high exposure to CO.

Symptoms of CO poisoning:

- Watery and itchy eyes
- Ringing in the ears
- Flushed appearance
- Nausea
- Tightness across the chest
- Incoherence
- Headache
- Throbbing temples
- Loss of physical coordination
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Inability to think coherently
- Collapse
- In attentiveness
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions

Some of these symptoms may appear as motion sickness, intoxication, or just feeling tired from being in the sun. The US Coast Guard recommends treating seasickness as possible CO poisoning. Get the person into fresh air immediately and seek medical attention unless you are sure it is not CO.

Prevent CO exposure/poisoning while boating:

- Know where and how CO may accumulate in and around your boat
- Maintain fresh air circulation throughout the boat at all times. Run exhaust blowers whenever the generator is operating.

- Never allow passengers to sit, body surf, or hang on the back deck or swim platform while the engines are running.
- Never enter areas under swim platforms where exhaust outlets are located unless the area has been properly ventilated
- If you smell exhaust fumes, CO is also present. Take immediate action to dissipate these fumes
- Install and maintain CO alarms inside your boat. Do not ignore any alarm
- Be vigilant in observing boat passengers for CO sickness
- Get a Vessel Safety Check

Protect your family and friends while on the lake by always being aware of CO exposure.

Helpful websites:

- [Carbon Monoxide Dangers](#)
- [Boating & Boat Safety](#)
- [Boating Safety: Carbon Monoxide](#)
- [Educational Information about Carbon Monoxide](#)