



Carbon Monoxide and Your Forklift

When forklifts are used inside of buildings and confined spaces, dangerous levels of carbon monoxide (CO) can build up quickly. CO is a poisonous gas that can cause dizziness and nausea. In high concentrations it can kill. Because it is impossible to smell, taste or see CO, it is crucial that you be aware of its dangers and do as much as you can to avoid overexposure before symptoms occur.

The Problem

Forklifts powered by gasoline, propane, and diesel fuel emit CO in their exhaust. In tightly insulated, enclosed areas, high concentrations of CO can remain for several hours after the last entry by a forklift. Emissions are worse from vehicles that are not turned up, but even new, factory-tuned vehicles can create a CO problem if used in an unventilated environment.

Recognizing the Symptoms

CO interferes with the blood's ability to carry oxygen. As CO accumulates in the blood, less oxygen is carried to the body and brain. Low exposures cause slight headaches. As concentrations increase, weakness and dizziness may occur. High exposures can cause nausea, vomiting, confusion, collapse, coma, and death. Be alert for CO poisoning year-round and especially during winter months when windows and doors are kept closed and ventilation is reduced. If you suspect CO poisoning; don't wait for symptoms to worsen. Headaches or dizziness during or after a forklift operation should be reported immediately.



Reducing the Risk

You can do several things to reduce your exposure to CO:

- Drive smart. Avoid racing the engine, breaking erratically, idling for long periods and jerky operation of the hydraulic systems. All of these increase CO emissions.
- Cold starts generate higher CO concentrations. Avoid storing or parking the forklift in cold areas to reduce warm up time and exhaust gases.
- Make sure your equipment is properly tuned up. Ask whether your vehicle can be fitted with a catalytic converter to reduce carbon monoxide release.
- Whenever possible, do not leave your forklift running inside a shipping truck or other container.

