

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a byproduct of the combustion of natural gas, wood, or any carbon-based fuel. It is a clear, odorless, and tasteless gas, and can cause death if gone undetected. Extended exposure to low levels of carbon monoxide—sometimes not detected by inexpensive carbon monoxide alarms—can cause long-term health problems.

Because there is such a variety of carbon monoxide detectors on the market, testing, inspection, analysis, or opinion of function of carbon monoxide detectors is not within the scope of the home inspection. While I do not specifically look for carbon monoxide detectors during the course of my inspection, if I do notice them, I will note their location, and I will test them using the built-in test button. The built-in test button, however, only verifies proper battery and alarm function; it does not test carbon monoxide detecting capabilities. There are many different types of carbon monoxide detectors available, some that can simply be plugged into an electric outlet. Some outlet plug-in units might have been present but might not have been visible due to furnishings and storage, and they might have been taken by the sellers when they moved out.

While most legal statutes in most states require that working smoke alarms be present at the close of escrow, the same, sadly, is not required of carbon monoxide detectors. I recommend adding carbon monoxide detectors to bedrooms and any other areas where people are likely to fall asleep, such as a near a cozy fireplace, in the family room with a comfortable couch and an entertainment system. I also recommend installing at least two carbon monoxide detectors in all residences to provide backup protection if a dead battery is present in one or if a detector is defective or fails.

I also recommend testing carbon monoxide detectors at move-in, installing fresh batteries, and testing them monthly. If the present detectors are old, or you do not know their age, I recommend simply replacing them. Carbon monoxide is a deadly killer, and the cost of carbon monoxide detectors is worth every penny if they can save a life. It is better to be safe than sorry.

