

Consumer's Guide to Massachusetts Requirements for Carbon Monoxide Alarms

In November 2005, Governor Mitt Romney signed "Nicole's Law" which places certain requirements on owners of all residential properties to install and maintain carbon monoxide (CO) alarms. The Board of Fire Prevention Regulations has developed the regulations (527 CMR 31.00) establishing the specific requirements of the law including the type, location, maintenance and inspection requirements for the alarms.

Who is impacted by this Law?

Generally speaking, anyone who owns residential property regardless of size, (i.e., 1- & 2-family homes, multi-family buildings, apartments, condominiums and townhouses, etc.) **that contain fossil burning fuel equipment** (i.e., oil, gas, wood, coal, etc.) **OR contains enclosed parking** (i.e., attached or enclosed garage) in Massachusetts, **is required to install CO alarms by March 31, 2006. In certain limited instances** (see below), the installation requirements are deferred until January 1, 2007

What do I have to do?

Install CO alarms on every level of your home except for basements and attics that do not have habitable living spaces (i.e., family rooms, dens, etc.) by March 31, 2006.

What kinds of CO alarms are allowed?

- There are several types of alarms that are allowed; they include
- Battery powered with battery monitoring
- Plug-in (AC powered) units with battery backup
- AC primary power with battery backup. (Hard-wired usually involves hiring an electrician)
- Low-voltage or wireless alarms
- Qualified combination smoke detectors and CO alarms

What are qualified Combination Detectors and Alarms?

Acceptable combination smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms must have simulated voice and tone alarms that clearly distinguish between the two types of emergencies. If you have questions about various types of smoke detectors, contact your local fire department.

What am I required to do if I'm a landlord?

Landlords must install CO alarms in each dwelling unit. Landlords also must inspect, test and maintain the CO alarms at least once a year or at the beginning of any rental period (such as lease renewal). Batteries are required to be replaced once a year. Tenants should

report any problems with alarms to the landlord immediately and learn to recognize the difference between the smoke detector and the carbon monoxide alarm.

What are alternative compliance options?

The regulation allows for alternative compliance options that may be more practical for larger buildings with multiple dwelling units that contain minimal or no sources of CO inside the individual units. The option allows owners to target the CO alarm protection in only those areas (i.e. rooms that contain boilers, hot water heaters, central laundry area and all adjacent spaces, in addition to enclosed parking areas) that could be potential sources of the CO. This CO protection option requires hardwiring or low-voltage wiring, monitoring (i.e., by an alarm company) and certain signal transmission requirements.

What are the limited instances where I don't have to install CO alarms until January 1, 2007?

Owners of residential buildings that notify the local fire department and choose the alternative compliance option and buildings owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (i.e., public housing units) will not be required to install CO alarms until January 1, 2007

Where do I have to put these CO alarms?

In most residences, carbon monoxide alarms are required to be located on every level of a home or dwelling unit including habitable portions of basements and attics. On levels with sleeping areas the alarms must be placed within ten feet of the bedroom doors. CO alarms do not go inside garages, but in the adjacent living areas.

When do I have to install CO alarms?

Most residences are required to install CO alarms by March 31, 2006. After that date anyone who sells their property will be required to have an inspection by the fire department prior to the sale or transfer of their property.

Why do I have to do this?

Carbon monoxide (CO), known as the *Invisible Killer*, is a colorless, odorless, poisonous gas that results from incomplete burning of fuels such as natural gas, propane, oil wood, coal, and gasoline. Each year many people die from accidental CO poisoning and thousands more are injured. This law was passed to protect all of us from the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

How can I tell if a CO alarm is approved?

CO alarms are approved by an independent testing company such as Underwriters' Laboratories (UL), Underwriter's Laboratory of Canada (ULC), or International Approval Service/Canadian Standards Association (IAS/CSA). Be sure to look for the approval label when buying CO alarms. Most of the CO alarms currently sold in the Commonwealth meet these standards but it is a good idea to check and make sure they meet the standard before you purchase the alarms.

How do I meet the requirement of the law?

If you install CO alarms on every habitable level by March 31, 2006 and keep them in good working order you don't have to do anything else to be in compliance with the law. When you sell your home, you must have an inspection and certificate from the local fire department before the sale is final. Contact your local fire department directly; they will know what to do to assist you.

How do I know if I have CO Poisoning?

The first symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to the flu (but without the fever). They include;

- **Headache**
- **Fatigue**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Nausea**
- **Dizziness**

***If you think you have symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning or your CO alarm is sounding, Dial 911 and leave the building immediately.**

For more information about the requirements of the law contact Greenfield Fire Prevention Division at 774-4323 or visit the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services website at www.mass.gov/dfs