

StarTribune.com | MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Last update: February 02, 2007 – 5:31 PM

Super-sensitive CO monitors are hard-to-get items

If you want a carbon monoxide monitor in your home, you might have trouble finding one. Or, at least, getting one without a wait.

Karen Youso

If you want a carbon monoxide monitor in your home, you might have trouble finding one. Or, at least, getting one without a wait.

As frustrated searcher Bev Nordley wrote:

"The Lung Association is obviously overwhelmed with orders as they will only take a reservation deposit at this time for delivery in 2-3 months. Help!"

It may seem odd that she was looking to the American Lung Association for carbon monoxide (CO) protection, but as was discussed in Tuesday's column, people looking for the best in CO detection can't just run into their local hardware or big-box store and get what they want.

Store shelves hold plenty of CO *alarms*; but they come with a disclaimer that the units won't necessarily protect the more vulnerable: pregnant women, fetuses, children, elderly or those with heart and lung issues.

To get that protection, you have to find the elusive CO *monitor*. They are more sensitive and will notify occupants of low levels of CO, providing better overall protection.

They're scarce because most manufacturers don't make them, at least not since 1998. That's when Underwriter's Lab (UL) decided to turn CO detectors (that prevent harm as well as death) into CO alarms (intended to prevent death). Most manufacturers complied to get the coveted UL label.

The idea was to reduce costly emergency CO calls to gas utilities and first responders. When the industry did that, however, it also put a subset of the population, those most vulnerable to the effects of CO, at some risk. Just how much risk is unclear. CO is a recognized toxin affecting the heart and brain, yet UL's standard is weaker than many U.S. and Canadian agency standards. What rankles many experts the most, however, is that the standard expressly prohibits the automatic display of low-levels of CO (below 30 parts per million over eight hours), which would protect as well as alert occupants of a developing problem so steps can be taken to fix it.

Although some experts say changes to the UL standard are coming later this year, don't wait to get CO protection into your home. A CO alarm is better than

nothing at all. It can save your life. Every residence should have at least a CO alarm. If you want more than minimal protection, consider beefing it up with a CO monitor, which can be harder to locate and costlier than an alarm.

To find one, look for units without the word "alarm" in the name, which usually signifies minimal protection, and check the enclosed literature for any disclaimers.

Some examples include:

Co-Expert Model 2004

The most sensitive CO monitor on the market, according to its maker, this unit has a display window that will automatically show low-level CO (below 30 ppm over 8 hours) and will alert occupants sooner than other devices. Because it exceeds UL standards, however, it does not carry the UL label. It sells for \$135 to \$150 and is available at:

- **Bonfe's Plumbing and Heating, 505 Randolph Av., St. Paul, 55102. Call 612-332-6633.**
- **Hankey & Brown Inspections. Call 952-829-0044**
www.hankeyandbrown.com. Click on "CO monitor" in left-side menu.
- **O'Connor's One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning, 1904 Vermillion St., Hastings, 55033. Call 651-437-4177.**
- **www.aeromedix.com** Click on "co monitors" in left side menu.
- **American Lung Association "Health House" Program, 1-800-586-4872,**
www.healthhouse.org

Pro-Tech 7035 and 7035SL

This CO alarm carries the UL label, so it can't automatically display low levels of CO (below 30 ppm over eight hours), but it does record them. Tap the test button to see current CO level (the highest level measured and the length of time it was present). Retails for \$84 to \$92, available online from: www.detectorsplus.com and www.sentrydetector.com.

Nighthawk Carbon Monoxide Alarm

This is an alarm with an advantage. It cannot automatically show low level CO, but push the peak level memory button to get the highest level detected starting at 11 ppm, according to the manufacturer. (However, not the length of time or current level.) Found at many retail outlets for around \$40.

Send your questions to Fixit in care of the Star Tribune, 425 Portland Av. S., Minneapolis, MN 55488, or call 612-673-9033, or e-mail

fixit@startribune.com. Past columns are available at www.startribune.com/fixit. Sorry, Fixit cannot supply individual replies.

©2007 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.