

# Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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## The Silent Killer

The chill of winter is almost upon us. In fact, many readers have had a taste of winter already. This likely means that safety directors across the country are blowing the dust off of their winter driving safety presentations and preparing to remind drivers once again of the unique hazards associated with operating a commercial vehicle when there's a potential for ice or snow on the road. Additionally, faithful readers of *"Beyond the Cab"* are (hopefully) reflecting back to the December 2004 issue in which they were encouraged to address winter "non-driving" safety along-side their traditional winter driving safety training agenda.

Holding true to the premise of *Midwestern's "Beyond the Cab"* newsletter, this issue focuses on a significant non-driving hazard that presents itself in the trucking industry. Exposure to this particular hazard is increased exponentially during the winter months, but is rarely treated with deserved attention.

The hazard referenced above is that of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Because of its qualities, it's known as the "silent killer." Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas. It's generated by combustion processes, such as those found in heating units and internal combustion engines. Relative to the trucking industry, sources of carbon monoxide include propane-fueled and gasoline-fueled fork lifts, temporary heating units, and gasoline-powered pressure washers, not to mention the trucks themselves.

Although carbon monoxide poisoning is not a hazard that is limited to winter months, there is an increased exposure to carbon monoxide sources during this time of the year resulting from our desire to

stay warm. The large overhead doors to the garage that remained open all spring, summer and fall are now kept closed whenever possible. The pressure-washer used to wash the trucks and trailers is now closed-up in a wash bay. Mechanics desiring some level of comfort in a drafty garage resort to a variety of heat sources. And occasionally, just occasionally a truck is permitted to idle indoors.

### Diesel Exhaust

Let's tackle the issue of diesel exhaust up front. It's true that "properly tuned" diesel engines often produce less than 1200 ppm carbon monoxide, making diesel exhaust considerably less of a CO hazard than gasoline-fueled engines. However, mechanics and other employees should nevertheless take exposure to carbon monoxide from diesel engines seriously, as even lower levels of carbon monoxide can prove dangerous (even fatal) given the right combination of other factors.

### Prevention

Although carbon monoxide exposure a significant hazard, preventing exposure to CO is not that difficult. The first step is to identify the potential sources of carbon monoxide in the workplace (pressure washers, fuel-powered heaters, etc.) and if possible, avoid using them indoors. In a situation in which that's not possible, ensure that the equipment is operating efficiently and that sufficient exhaust ventilation is provided.

But that's not it. Where the potential for CO exposure exists, means of detecting the gas before a serious situation develops is also advisable. This can be accomplished by placing CO detectors in work areas that may present a hazard. Some of the referenced sources at the conclusion of this newsletter provide

advice on selection and placement of such devices.

### Drivers are not Immune

Unfortunately, the hazard of carbon monoxide poisoning is not limited to fixed facilities, such as truck garages and warehouses. Many of you may remember reading of a driver who was found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning in his sleeper while at a Kentucky rest stop in April 2004.

Such events are tragic. But they are not beyond your control. Safety directors are encouraged to reinforce to both drivers and mechanics the importance of inspecting exhaust system for cracks and rust-through and for loose connection clamps. By evidencing developing weaknesses in the exhaust system, the hazard of escaping exhaust gases entering the truck cab can be prevented.

### Additional Information

For additional information about the hazards and prevention of carbon monoxide exposure, review the following websites.

- [www.carbonmonoxidekills.com](http://www.carbonmonoxidekills.com)
- [www.aboutcarbonmonoxide.com](http://www.aboutcarbonmonoxide.com)
- [www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/LINKS/co.htm](http://www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/LINKS/co.htm)

### Other Non-Driving Winter Hazards

As previously mentioned, the December 2004 issue of *"Beyond the Cab"* addressed the importance of addressing non-driving winter hazards in addition to presenting the topic of winter driving safety. If you would like a copy of that article, or other previous issues of *"Beyond the Cab,"* send your request to [losscontrol@miains.com](mailto:losscontrol@miains.com) or (502)429-9990.

