

# **New Carbon Monoxide Alarm Requirements**

*3/30/2006*

*Written By Mass. Dept of Fire Services*

## **Nicole's Law**

On November 4, 2005, Governor Romney signed "Nicole's Law", named after 7-year old Nicole Garofalo who died on January 28, 2005 when her Plymouth home was filled with deadly amounts of carbon monoxide on January 24. The furnace vents had been blocked by snow during a power outage.

### Provisions of New Regulations for CO Detectors

For buildings with fossil-fuel burning equipment or enclosed parking areas, the new regulations require carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home and within ten feet of each sleeping area and in habitable portions of basements and attics.

The CO detectors may be:

- Battery operated with battery monitoring; or
- Plug-ins with battery back-up; or
- Hard-wired with battery backup; or
- Low voltage system; or
- Wireless, or
- Qualified combination (smoke/carbon monoxide alarm)

Acceptable combination smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms must have simulated voice and tone alarms that clearly distinguish between the two types of emergencies. The State Building Code mandates that only photoelectric combination alarms are permitted within twenty feet of a bathroom or kitchen.

All affected residences must install approved carbon monoxide alarms by March 31, 2006, although, where hard-wired systems are required, the deadline is January 1, 2007.

Fire Marshal Coan indicated that the board is continuing to develop additional CO alarm requirements for certain transient residential buildings such as hotels and motels, in addition to requirements for certain institutional buildings. It is anticipated that the regulations for these types of buildings will be promulgated in the very near future in order to meet the statutes January 1, 2007 deadline.

## **Alternative Compliance Options**

The regulations 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 only in those areas that could be potential sources of the CO. Examples include rooms that contain boilers, hot water heaters, central laundry areas and all adjacent spaces, in addition to enclosed parking areas. This CO protection option requires hard or low voltage wiring, monitoring and certain signal transmission requirements. The deadline for compliance with this method of protection is January 1, 2007.

**Landlords Must Inspect Annually and at Start of Each Rental Period**  
Landlords must inspect, maintain, and replace, if necessary, required CO alarms annually and at the beginning of any rental period. Tenants should report any problems with detectors to the landlord immediately and learn to recognize the difference between the smoke alarm and the carbon monoxide detector.

## **Enforcement**

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, "Most homeowners are surely eager to comply with these new regulations in order to protect their own families and their tenants. We know that carbon monoxide poisoning can kill right away, but a recent study (by the Journal of American Medical Association, 2006;295:398-402, Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation) has shown that suffering carbon monoxide poisoning increases the risk of heart problems later on that can lead to premature death."

The Department of Public Health is required to adopt and enforce this requirement on landlords as part of the State Sanitary code.

Fire departments are currently required to inspect smoke alarms when one-five unit homes are being sold and transferred. Starting March 31, 2006 (or January 1, 2007 where hard-wired are required) fire departments will be required to inspect all residences upon sale and transfer for carbon monoxide detectors. Maximum fees for separate or joint inspecting of CO alarms and smoke detectors are \$50.00 for single-family homes or units (i.e. condo), \$100.00 for 2-family dwellings, \$150.00 for 3-6 unit dwellings and \$500.00 for 6 or more unit buildings.

## **Dangers of Carbon Monoxide**

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), an acceptable level of CO is a 15 parts per millions (PPM) average over a time span of eight hours or a 22 PPM average for an hour. If you have 1,000 PPM for over thirty minutes, it puts you at a high level of danger in the form of a collapse into a coma or permanent brain damage. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that results from incomplete combustion of fossil fuels such as gas, propane, oil, wood, coal, and gasoline.

Note – The CO alarm requirements for certain sidewalled gas fueled equipment installations (see 248 C.M.R. 5.08), required by the State Plumbing code, remain in full effect and are not affected at this time by the passage of Nicole's law. This CO requirement is to be enforced by the local plumbing/gas inspector (for more information, see the Fire Marshal's advisory Revised Emergency Gas Code Regulation).

For more information log onto the Mass. Dept of Fire Services at [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs)

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