Where Should I Put My CO Detectors?

Placing carbon monoxide (CO) detectors in the right locations is essential for effective detection and safety. The National Fire Protection Association recommends smoke detectors be installed on every level of your home, including the basement, and here are the best places to install them:

1. Near Sleeping Areas. Install a CO detector within 5-15 feet of every bedroom or sleeping area. This ensures that the alarm will wake occupants if CO levels become dangerous while they're sleeping.

2. On Each Level of the Home. Place at least one CO detector on every level of your home, including the basement.

3. Near Attached Garages. If your home has an attached garage, install a detector near the door leading to the garage, as CO from running vehicles can seep into the house.

4. Close to Fuel-Burning Appliances. Install detectors near appliances like furnaces, water heaters, stoves, and fireplaces, but keep them at least 5-20 feet away to prevent false alarms.

5. Correct Placement Height. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for height placement. CO is slightly lighter than air and mixes evenly with it, so detectors can be placed on walls or ceilings. Wall-mounted detectors should be about 5–6 feet off the floor.

6. In Living Areas. Place detectors in common living spaces, such as the family room, where people spend significant amounts of time.

Avoid These Locations:

- Bathrooms: High humidity can affect the detector's performance.
- Near Windows or Vents: Airflow can prevent accurate CO detection.
- Behind Furniture: Obstructions can hinder the detector's ability to sense CO.
- Kitchens: Avoid placing too close to cooking appliances to reduce false alarms.

Additional Tips:

- Follow the manufacturer's installation instructions for specific guidance.
- Test your CO detectors monthly and replace the batteries every 6-12 months.
- Replace the detectors themselves every 5-7 years, depending on the model.

When Should I Replace My CO Detectors?

You can tell when your carbon monoxide (CO) detector needs to be replaced by looking for the following signs:

1. Expiration Date. Most CO detectors have a lifespan of 5–7 years. Check the manufacture date or expiration date printed on the back or side of the detector. If it's past the expiration date, replace it. Some experts simply recommend replacing them every 5 years.

2. End-of-Life Warning. Many modern CO detectors emit an end-of-life chirp or signal to indicate they need replacement. This sound is different from the low-battery chirp and will often be accompanied by a light or display message. The units instructions should explain the different sounds and what they mean, and it's not a bad idea to use a Sharpie to write what the end-of-life signal is (i.e., "3 beeps") on the unit somewhere that you can see, in case you lose the instructions and don't remember which sound means what.

3. Frequent Malfunctions. If the detector is giving frequent false alarms, failing to test correctly, or not responding to the test button, it may no longer be functioning properly.

4. No Response During Testing. Press the test button monthly. If the detector doesn't emit a loud beep, even after battery replacement, it's time for a new one.

5. Discoloration or Damage. Yellowing or physical damage to the device can indicate aging or exposure to heat, humidity, or other conditions that compromise its function.

Preventative Maintenance Tips:

- **Clean Regularly**: Dust and debris can interfere with sensors. Wipe the detector gently with a dry or slightly damp cloth.
- **Check Batteries**: Replace the batteries at least once a year or as needed, even if the detector is hardwired.
- **Keep a Log**: Note the installation date so you can track when to replace the unit. Again, some people use a Sharpie to write the installation date right on the unit for easy reference.

If you're unsure about your detector's condition or lifespan, it's better to err on the side of caution and replace it.

Should I Buy Individual Smoke and CO Detectors or Combo Units?

As with smoke detectors, there are many different models and brands of carbon monoxide detectors. Some are battery-powered, some are hard-wired into your home's electrical system, and some have a long-life lithium battery that will last for ten years (after which you must purchase a new detector).

There are also combination detectors on the market that detect both smoke and carbon monoxide. Choosing between separate smoke detectors and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors

versus a combination unit depends on several factors, including effectiveness, convenience, and safety.

Advantages of Separate Units:

1. **Specialization**: Separate units can be more finely tuned to detect their specific threats. Smoke detectors are designed to detect smoke particles, while CO detectors are calibrated for carbon monoxide levels.
2. **Placement Flexibility**: You can place each type of detector in the most effective location based on their specific requirements (e.g., smoke detectors near kitchens and CO detectors near sleeping areas).
3. **Independence**: If one unit fails or requires maintenance, the other will still function, providing continuous protection.

Advantages of Combination Units:

1. **Space-Saving**: A combo unit takes up less wall space and can be easier to install, especially in smaller homes or apartments.
2. **Convenience**: Fewer devices mean less maintenance and fewer batteries to change. Many combo units will alert you to both smoke and CO issues with different sounds or indicators.
3. **Cost-Effective**: Buying one unit can sometimes be cheaper than purchasing two separate devices.

However, according to **Consumer Reports**, "Few combination detectors are effective at detecting carbon monoxide, smoldering fires, and flaming fires, which is why we recommend that consumers use a combination of detectors in their homes for complete protection."

As with smoke detectors, always look for the Underwriters Laboratories mark on any carbon monoxide detectors you buy.

Considerations:

- **Detection Technology**: Ensure that whichever option you choose uses reliable detection technology. Some combo units may not perform as well as dedicated detectors.
- **Compliance**: Check local building codes or regulations regarding smoke and CO detectors, as some areas may have specific requirements.
- **Testing and Maintenance**: Regardless of the type, regular testing and maintenance are crucial to ensure both smoke and CO detectors are functioning properly.