

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Carbon Monoxide

Are you confused about carbon monoxide detection requirements? If so, you're not alone. Most people are aware that Massachusetts now requires homes to install detectors, however, when asked, the details seem to remain a bit unclear. Under new legislation signed into law last November by Governor Romney, Massachusetts has become the ninth state in the U.S. (and third state in New England) to require carbon monoxide detectors for residential dwellings. Known as Nicole's Law, it was named after 7-year-old Nicole Garofalo of Plymouth who passed away last year when a snow-blocked heating vent trapped carbon monoxide fumes in her family's home.

The language contained in Nicole's law takes effect on March 31, 2006, and applies to single and multi-family housing units, as well as large complexes like hotels, motels and college dorms. Housing units that have enclosed parking or equipment such as boilers, furnaces or hot water heaters powered by gas, coal, oil or wood will be required to have a working CO detector in place. In most instances, compliance with the law will simply require installation of a battery powered or plug-in detector. Acceptable combination smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms must have simulated voice and tone alarms that clearly distinguish between the two types of emergencies. Hard-wired detectors will be required for large buildings with multiple units and other special cases. These properties will have until Jan 1, 2007 to comply. Enforcement will be carried out by local fire departments during home inspections prior to the sale or transfer of property. 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.

Known as the silent killer, the odorless, colorless and tasteless gas is responsible for more than 2,000 deaths nationwide each year, and is the leading cause of accidental deaths in America, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association. In 2003, there were nearly 3,000 cases reported throughout Massachusetts, most of which came from residences during the winter months. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to flu symptoms and commonly include nausea, headache and fatigue.

If you haven't yet installed a carbon monoxide detector, both Brightwood Hardware in town, and Rocky's Hardware in East Longmeadow carry a full line of detectors. Prices start at about \$25.00, and both stores offer battery-operated and the plug-in varieties that are in compliance with the regulations set out by the fire department. If you have questions about the requirements, a call to the fire department should help clear up any lingering confusion.