

CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) DETECTORS

A bill passed by the California legislature in 2010 mandated carbon monoxide detectors in all California housing. The mandate was effective for all single-family dwelling units in July 2011, and for all other existing units by January 2013. Some Venturanza owners have not yet installed CO detectors.

A potential CO hazard is present on every floor of a Venturanza unit: on the ground level, from cars and gas dryers in the garage; on the middle level, from the fireplace and from the kitchen range or oven; and on the third floor, from the furnace installed in the attic. Owners who have not installed CO detectors should do so as soon as feasible. Install them in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Optimum coverage would call for one alarm at ground level inside the unit, one at the second level between the kitchen and the fireplace, and one on the third level on the landing between bedrooms.

Some detectors are stand-alone CO monitors and some combine CO detectors with smoke detectors. Examples of either type can be plugged into a wall socket, hardwired to the house electrical system, battery operated, or hardwired with battery backup. Recent California laws have changed the marketplace. All combined smoke-CO detectors manufactured after January 1, 2014 must have a long-life (10 years) lithium battery as primary or backup power, and are intended to be disposable after 10 years' use. Stand-alone CO detectors don't have this requirement, but they have improved; their power supplies vary, but the sensors in old ones die in five to seven years, while newer ones are good for ten. Read the specifications of any detector carefully to avoid outmoded products still in hardware stores.

Each owner must choose an appropriate strategy. Some (perhaps most) of VDV's units are still equipped with their original hardwired smoke detectors without battery backup. Replacing them with new combination units might require costly work by a licensed electrician. Mounting a single battery-powered CO detector on the third floor wall between the bedrooms would meet the minimum legal requirement for an owner-occupied unit. A simple but more complete solution would be to equip each unit with three battery-operated CO monitors that meet the current standard, installing one at each level on the wall in the vicinity of the existing smoke detector. If your unit is rented out more specific regulations govern smoke and CO detectors, and these requirements change after January 1, 2016. Owners should consult their rental agent or the Fire Marshal's office for advice on rental units.