

Brookhaven is First in the Nation to Enact Legislation Requiring Digital Carbon Monoxide Detectors in Homes

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Existing homes must comply with the new law by 2021

Farmingville, NY - At the September 9 Town Board meeting, Supervisor Ed Romaine and the Town Council voted unanimously to adopt a new law requiring all homes in the Town of Brookhaven to have digital carbon monoxide detectors installed. Existing homes have until August 2021 to comply. The local law, which is the first of its kind in the nation, is aimed to prevent illness or death due to carbon monoxide poisoning such as occurred on February 23 of this year at Legal Seafood in Huntington. That incident, which was caused by a malfunctioning water heater flue pipe, claimed the life of one person and caused dozens more to be taken to the hospital for treatment. The new law does not apply to commercial or industrial businesses. Councilwomen Connie Kepert and Valerie M. Cartright co-sponsored the new legislation.

"Each year, thousands of people are stricken with low level carbon monoxide poisoning, and don't even know it," said Supervisor Ed Romaine. "This new law will help to prevent many of these incidents from occurring, as well as preventing more serious illness or even accidental death due to high levels of carbon monoxide in the home."

Councilwoman Kepert, said, "This legislation, which I was proud to sponsor, requires all homes to have at least one digital readout carbon monoxide detector. These detectors empower people to protect their families from a silent and deadly gas which is produced by any fuel-burning device, such as gas stoves, gas-powered furnaces, and portable generators. Persons with CO poisoning are often unaware that the symptoms they are experiencing, which include headache, nausea, dizziness, or confusion, are caused by carbon monoxide exposure. Steve Nelson, who eventually died of carbon monoxide exposure at Legal Seafood in Huntington, was sick for months, but was unaware of what was causing his symptoms. Unintentional CO exposure accounts for an estimated 15,000 emergency department visits and 500 deaths in the United States each year. Digital detectors in homes and businesses will help prevent needless tragedies"

Councilwoman Cartright said, "The Town of Brookhaven is actively implementing safety measures which will help increase the quality of life and wellbeing of our residents. With this law, we hope to significantly reduce, and hopefully eliminate, carbon monoxide related illnesses and deaths by increasing awareness of carbon monoxide levels."

Unlike standard carbon monoxide detectors, which only sound an alarm when dangerous levels are reached, the digital detectors indicate even the slightest level of carbon monoxide present in the home. Sustained low levels of the noxious gas can cause a number of ailments including shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, dizziness and loss of consciousness.

"According to a review in the New England Journal of Medicine, people can become very sick from exposure to carbon monoxide at levels significantly lower than the levels that will trigger the audible alarm on a standard carbon monoxide detector. Symptoms that can be difficult for doctors to diagnose, include headaches, chronic fatigue, emotional distress, memory deficits, difficulty working and sleeping, vertigo, and recurrent infections. The most vulnerable to low level carbon monoxide poisoning include: newborns, pregnant women and their developing fetuses, people with coronary artery disease, and senior citizens," said Neal Lewis, executive director of the Sustainability Institute at Molloy College. "The installation of carbon monoxide monitors with digital displays will empower Brookhaven residents with an important tool to protect their health from low-level carbon monoxide exposure and will help to identify problems with mechanical systems in the home before those problems become an emergency."

"The Brookhaven Supervisor and town board illustrated their comment to public health by unanimously passing this resolution. The types of carbon monoxide detectors with digital displays would have help me when I became sick from a low level leak of carbon monoxide in my home which did not trigger the alarm on the standard detector that most homes have," said Barbara LoMoriello, who spoke about her own experience with low level carbon monoxide exposure at the public hearing.

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