



An Extended Guide · No. 1666

What to Do If the CO Alarm Sounds

The plan to have
before you ever need it

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

BillsHomeTech.com · (330) 200-8042 · Atwater, Ohio

Free & printable — share it with someone who needs it



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

! Read this first — carbon monoxide is the real danger

A running generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run a generator indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. Run it outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on each floor and outside the bedrooms. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. This guide is the plan for the worst moment — fresh air first, then 911, and never go back inside to check. Have it clear in your own mind, and shared with everyone at home, long before you ever need it.

The plan to have before you ever need it

Almost no one plans what they'll do if a carbon-monoxide alarm goes off. This guide is that plan — short, calm, and clear — so that if the moment ever comes, no one has to figure it out on the spot.

I'm Bill. I hope you never hear that alarm for real. But the whole reason we put alarms in a house is for the rare night something goes wrong, and an alarm only helps if everyone knows what it means and what to do. That knowledge is worth having ready, the same way you'd know your way out in a fire.

So read this once when things are calm, share it with everyone under your roof, and keep it where you can find it. It's a few minutes now for real peace of mind — and, if it ever matters, for the response that keeps your family safe.

★ A plan shared is a plan that works

The most important thing you can do with this guide is talk it through with your household — including guests and grandkids who visit. If you'd like help setting up alarms and walking everyone through the plan, that's a visit I take to heart. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The 60-second version

If you read nothing else in this guide, read — and share — this page.

- ❑ If a carbon-monoxide alarm sounds, treat it as real — every time, no exceptions.
- ❑ Get everyone and every pet outside to fresh air immediately. Don't stop to open windows, find the cause, or grab things.
- ❑ From outside, call 911. Say a CO alarm went off and whether anyone feels sick.
- ❑ Do a head count so you know everyone is out — and do NOT go back inside for any reason.
- ❑ Wait outside until emergency responders tell you it's safe to go back in.
- ❑ Get a medical check even if symptoms fade, and don't restart anything until the cause is found and fixed.
- ❑ A single chirp now and then is usually a low battery; a loud, continuous alarm is danger — get out.

! Fresh air first, questions later

That's the whole plan in five words. Everything else in this guide just spells it out. Get out, call 911, stay out — and never go back in to check.

Treat every alarm as real — every time

The single most dangerous thing you can do when an alarm sounds is talk yourself out of it. So let's settle that now, in advance.

Carbon monoxide is invisible and has no smell. You cannot look around, sniff the air, or feel fine and conclude the alarm is wrong — there's simply nothing for your senses to check. The alarm can detect what you can't, which is the entire reason it's on the wall.

A genuinely false alarm is rare, and the cost of treating a real one as false can be a life. So the math is simple: if it sounds, you leave. If it turns out to be nothing, you've lost a few minutes and a little sleep. That is a trade worth making every single time, without hesitation and without debate at the door.

! Never wait to 'be sure'

You will never regret leaving over an alarm that turned out to be nothing. You could deeply regret waiting to be certain. When it sounds, the deciding is already done — everyone goes outside.

Step 1: get everyone and the pets out — now

The very first move, before anything else, is to get every person and every pet out of the house and into fresh air.

Fresh air is the treatment for carbon monoxide, and fresh air is outside — not by an open window, not in the doorway. Move steadily to your meeting spot away from the house. The instinct to do a few 'quick' things first is exactly what puts people in danger, so decide now that you won't.

- Don't stop to open windows — the air you need is outside, not by a window.
- Don't stop to look for the cause — finding it is the responders' job, not yours.
- Don't stop to gather belongings — things can be replaced.
- Do bring everyone out: children, anyone who moves slowly, and the pets.

! Getting out is the whole job right now

In this first moment there is only one task: bodies out of the building and into open air. Everything else — the call, the cause, the generator — comes after everyone is safely outside.

Step 2: from outside, call 911

Once you're all out in fresh air, call 911. Make the call from outside, not from inside while you finish something.

You don't need the right words — the dispatcher will guide you. Just tell them plainly what's happening and answer their questions. They deal with this and know exactly what to send and what to ask.

- Say clearly that a carbon-monoxide alarm has gone off in your home.
- Say whether anyone feels sick, and how many people were inside.
- Mention a generator is running, if it is, and roughly where it sits.
- Stay on the line and follow the dispatcher's instructions.

✓ It is always worth the call

Some folks hesitate to call 911 when no one feels sick. Don't. You cannot see or smell CO, symptoms can lag, and checking a home for it is exactly what responders are trained and equipped to do. Making the call is the right choice, every time.

Step 3: count heads, and do not go back in

With everyone outside and 911 called, two things keep the moment safe: knowing everyone is out, and staying out.

Do a quick head count at your meeting spot — every person and every pet. If someone is missing, tell the 911 dispatcher right away. Do not go back inside to search yourself; responders have the training and the air packs to do it safely, and you do not.

Then hold the line on the hardest instinct of all: do not go back inside for any reason until responders say it's safe. Not for a phone, not for medication, not for the family photos, not to silence the alarm, not 'just to check.' Carbon monoxide is invisible and can overcome you faster than you'd expect, and a quick trip inside is exactly how a scare becomes a tragedy.

! Never go back inside to check

This is the rule that saves lives when everything in you wants to break it. Whatever is inside can wait or be replaced. A person cannot. Stay out, together, until the people with the equipment tell you the air is safe again.

Shutting the generator off — only if it's on your way out

Turning the generator off stops more carbon monoxide from being made — but it never, ever comes before getting out.

If the generator happens to sit right along your path to safety, and you can switch it off and step away without slowing anyone's exit, then doing so helps. If moving it a little farther from the house is just as quick and easy on your way past, that helps too.

But read the rule carefully: only if it costs you no delay and no detour. Never walk back toward the fumes to reach it, never send someone to deal with it while others wait, and never let 'I'll just shut it off first' slow the one thing that matters — everyone getting to fresh air. If there's any doubt, leave it running and let the responders handle it.

! Out first — the generator is a distant second

The generator can keep running for a while with no new harm to people who are already outside. The people are what can't wait. When in doubt, walk away from it, not toward it, and get out.

Get a medical check — even if you feel better

Feeling fine again in fresh air is a good sign, but it is not the same as being in the clear. This step matters more than people expect.

Carbon-monoxide symptoms can ease once you're breathing clean air and then return, and some effects show up hours later rather than right away. That's why a medical check is worth it even when everyone seems recovered — tell the responders or the doctor that carbon-monoxide exposure is suspected, so they know what to look for.

This matters most for the people CO hits hardest: infants and young children, older adults, anyone pregnant, and anyone with a heart or lung condition. If anyone was inside for long, felt symptoms, or seems 'off' afterward, err firmly on the side of getting checked.

! A fading headache is not an all-clear

The temptation, once the fresh air helps, is to decide it was nothing and move on. Resist it. Let a professional make that call. A check that turns out fine is a good afternoon; a delayed effect caught early can be everything.

Know a chirp from a real alarm

Two very different sounds get confused all the time, and the confusion cuts both ways — so let's make the difference plain.

A slow, occasional single chirp — one beep every minute or so — is almost always the alarm telling you its battery is low, or that the unit has reached the end of its life. It's a maintenance nudge, not an emergency: replace the battery, or replace the alarm if it's reached its date.

A real carbon-monoxide alarm is different and unmistakable — loud and continuous, or a rapid repeating pattern, and it won't quit. That's the danger signal, and it means get out. The risk is a tired person waving off a real alarm as 'just the battery again' — so when you're not certain which you're hearing, treat it as the real thing, get out, and sort it out from the safety of outside.

✓ When unsure, let the sound win

If you can't tell a chirp from an alarm at 2 a.m., don't stand there deciding. Step outside with everyone first; you can always come back to a chirping battery, but you can't undo waiting on a real alarm.

Find and fix the cause before any restart

Once responders have cleared the home, there's one more job before life goes back to normal: understand why it happened.

An alarm that sounded for a real reason will sound again if nothing changes — so don't just reset it and carry on. Walk through the likely causes with a clear head, and fix the real one, before the generator or anything else runs again.

- The generator too close to the house, or its exhaust aimed at a window, door, or vent.
- A wind shift that pushed the exhaust back toward the house during the run.
- An engine running in an enclosed space — a generator or a car in a garage, even with the door up.
- Another fuel-burning source — a blocked furnace vent, or a grill or heater brought indoors.
- An alarm at the end of its life triggering on its own — but never assume that until it's confirmed.

! Don't reset your way past a warning

Silencing or resetting an alarm makes the noise stop; it does nothing about the carbon monoxide. Treat a real alarm as a message that something needs fixing, and fix that something before you trust the air again.

Re-check the spot against the 20-foot rule

If a running generator was the cause, or even if you're not sure, walk its placement against the rule before it ever runs again.

The core rule doesn't change: outdoors only, at least 20 feet from the house measured to the nearest wall, with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent — yours and the neighbor's. If the alarm sounded, the honest questions are whether it was truly far enough, aimed right, and clear of the way the wind was actually blowing.

When in doubt, move it farther out and turn the exhaust further away. You will never regret extra distance. Our 20-foot-rule guide walks through picking and marking a genuinely safe spot, so the next run starts from solid ground.

! The alarm did its job — now let the rule do its

An alarm that sounded and got everyone out worked exactly as it should. The way to honor that is to fix the placement so it doesn't have to sound again: farther, aimed away, in the open air.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The plan is the same in every home — out, call, stay out — but where you live shapes how the minutes after the alarm play out.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, help is usually close and so are your neighbors. Responders tend to arrive quickly, which is a real comfort — and the closeness of other homes adds one thing to your plan.

- Responders are typically minutes away — calling early gets that help moving even sooner.
- If exhaust or fumes may be drifting toward a neighbor's home, warn them too, from outside.
- Pick a meeting spot that's clearly away from the house but easy for arriving crews to find.
- Close quarters mean a neighbor may even notice your alarm — a good reason they should know your plan.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country, responders have farther to travel, and that changes the stakes. Getting out early and having alarms that truly work aren't just good practice — they're the margin that keeps everyone safe while help is on its way.

- A longer response time makes leaving at the first alarm, without hesitation, even more important.
- Working, battery-backup alarms matter more when help is farther off — test them and keep spare batteries.
- Have a clear meeting spot and a way to flag the driveway, since crews may not know the property.
- If you're truly remote, make sure someone knows to check on you, and keep a charged phone reachable outside.

★ Let's make the plan fit your place

Whether help is five minutes away or a good deal more, I'm glad to help you set up working alarms, pick a meeting spot, and walk the whole household through the plan. Call (330) 200-8042.

Make sure everyone knows the plan in advance

A plan only works if the people in the house already know it when the alarm sounds — there's no time to explain it then.

Sit down once, on an ordinary day, and walk the household through it: what the alarm sounds like, that it means go outside now, where the meeting spot is, and that no one goes back in. Keep it calm and simple — you're building a habit, not a fright. Then remember the people who aren't there every day.

- Tell guests and visiting grandkids where the meeting spot is and what the alarm means.
- Decide in advance who helps anyone who moves slowly, and who brings the pets.
- Make sure anyone hard of hearing has a way to be woken — check the alarm maker's options.
- Keep a charged phone habit, so calling 911 from outside is second nature.

★ A five-minute talk is the whole thing

You don't need a drill or a binder — just one calm conversation so no one is hearing the plan for the first time in the dark. If you'd like a hand walking the family through it, that's exactly what I'm here for. Reach me at (330) 200-8042.

Do and don't, in a carbon-monoxide emergency

The whole plan, side by side — the instinct to resist next to the move that keeps everyone safe.

Do	Don't
Get everyone and pets outside first.	Stop to open windows or investigate.
Call 911 from outside.	Call from inside while you look around.
Do a head count at the meeting spot.	Assume everyone made it out on their own.
Stay out until responders clear it.	Slip back in for a phone, pet, or meds.
Get checked even if you feel fine.	Shrug it off once the headache fades.

! When in doubt, get out and stay out

Every 'do' above points the same way — toward the door and away from the risk. If you ever can't remember the details, that single direction is enough: out, and stay out.

If someone is badly affected

Most of the time everyone walks out on their own. But it helps to know, in advance and calmly, what a serious situation looks like.

Take it as a true emergency if someone has collapsed, is struggling to breathe, is deeply confused, won't wake up, or has bluish lips. Get them out to fresh air if you can reach them without putting yourself in danger, and call 911 immediately — say plainly what's happening and how many people are affected.

Then follow the dispatcher's instructions to the letter; they can talk you through exactly what to do until help arrives. Don't go into a space that's overcome one person in the hope of reaching them if it puts you at risk too — a second person down helps no one. This is precisely why getting everyone out at the first alarm matters so much.

! Say it plainly to the dispatcher

If someone is unconscious, not breathing well, or won't wake, tell 911 in those exact words. It changes what they send and how fast, and it gets you the right instructions in the moments that count most.

The mistakes people make in the moment

Knowing the common missteps in advance makes them far easier to skip when the alarm is actually blaring.

- **Opening windows and waiting** instead of leaving — airing out is not the same as getting out.
- **Hunting for the source** before evacuating — every extra minute inside is a risk you don't need to take.
- **Going back in** for a phone, a pet, or medication before responders have cleared the home.
- **Assuming it's a false alarm** because no one feels sick yet — symptoms can lag well behind the exposure.
- **Silencing the alarm and going back to bed** — quieting the sound does nothing about the gas.

! Every one of these feels reasonable at 2 a.m.

That's the trap: each mistake above seems sensible in a groggy, hurried moment. Deciding now — out first, always — is what keeps a tired brain from talking itself into the wrong move later.

Questions worth asking

A few plain questions that clear up most of the worry I hear about this.

Q: What exactly do I say when I call 911?

That a carbon-monoxide alarm went off in your home, whether anyone feels sick, how many people were inside, and that a generator is running if it is. Then just follow the dispatcher — they'll take it from there.

Q: How do I tell a chirp from a real alarm?

A low-battery chirp is a single beep now and then. A real alarm is loud and continuous, or a rapid repeating pattern, and it won't stop. If you're ever unsure, treat it as real, get out, and sort it out from outside.

Q: Can I turn the generator off before I leave?

Only if it's right on your way out and you can do it with no delay and no detour. Getting everyone out comes first — never head toward the fumes to reach it.

Q: We got out and feel fine now — do we still need a doctor?

Yes, get checked. CO symptoms can fade in fresh air and then return, and some effects are delayed. Tell them carbon-monoxide exposure is suspected.

★ There's no silly question here

This is the one topic where I'd genuinely rather you call and ask than wonder. If any part of the plan is unclear, reach me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll walk through it together.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks thinking this plan through, answered plainly.

Q: Should I really call 911 if the alarm sounds but no one feels sick?

Yes. You can't see or smell carbon monoxide, and symptoms can lag behind exposure. Get out, call from outside, and let responders check — that's exactly what they're there for.

Q: When is it safe to go back inside?

Only when emergency responders tell you it is — not when the alarm stops, not when you feel better, not when it seems fine. When they say so.

Q: Why can't I go back in for just a second?

Because CO is invisible and can overcome you fast, and 'just a second' is how people get hurt. Whatever's inside can wait or be replaced; a person can't.

Q: The alarm keeps going off after everyone's out and it seems fine — now what?

Don't reset it and ignore it. Have the cause found and fixed — placement, a wind shift, or an aging alarm — before anyone trusts the air again. Our CO-alarms guide can help.

! Share this page tonight

A plan in one person's head isn't a household plan. Read this page with everyone you live with — and revisit it any time a new person, a new generator, or a new home changes things.

Practice the plan on a calm day

You don't need a fire-drill production — just a quiet check that everyone knows the few things that matter.

Once a year, or whenever your household changes, run through these quickly together. It takes a couple of minutes and turns a plan on paper into something everyone can actually do half-asleep.

- ☐ Everyone knows the alarm's sound, and that it means get outside now.
- ☐ Everyone knows the one meeting spot outside, well away from the house.
- ☐ Someone is assigned to help anyone who moves slowly, and to bring the pets.
- ☐ Everyone knows: call 911 from outside, and never go back in.
- ☐ Anyone hard of hearing has a way to be woken by the alarm.

✓ Walk to the meeting spot once

Actually strolling out to your meeting spot together, on a nice day, makes it stick in a way that just talking about it doesn't — especially for little ones and for guests who don't know the yard.

Bringing it all together

The plan is short by design: out, call 911, stay out, get checked, and fix the cause before anything runs again.

This guide is the response; a few of our others are the prevention. Our CO-alarms guide covers choosing and placing the alarms that give you this warning in the first place. Our how-CO-poisoning-happens guide explains the symptoms and why the gas is so dangerous. And our 20-foot-rule guide covers placing the generator so the alarm rarely has a reason to sound at all.

Together they add up to the same quiet promise: a warning you can trust, a household that knows what to do, and a generator placed so the danger stays outside where it belongs.

★ Let's get your whole plan in place

On a visit I'll help you set up and test your alarms, place the generator safely, and walk everyone through exactly what to do if the alarm ever sounds. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

If you remember only one thing

Out of everything in this guide, one line is the one to carry.

Get out first, and never go back in to check. Everyone and the pets to fresh air, call 911 from outside, and stay out until responders say it's safe. The medical check, the cause, the placement — all of that matters, and all of it comes after the people are safely outside.

! Say it back to yourself

Alarm sounds — everyone out. Call 911 from outside. Head count. And never, ever go back inside to check. That's the plan, and it's the difference that can save a life.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made having a carbon-monoxide emergency plan feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

The Moment the Alarm Sounds

Four moves, in order -- no stopping



Fresh air first -- never go back in to check.

Chirp vs. Alarm

Two very different sounds

	Chirp	Alarm
Sound	One short beep	Loud, nonstop
How often	Now and then	Right away, on
Means	Low battery	CO danger now
You do	Change battery	Get out, call 911

A chirp is a battery. A real alarm is an emergency -- get out.

Do vs. Don't in a CO Emergency

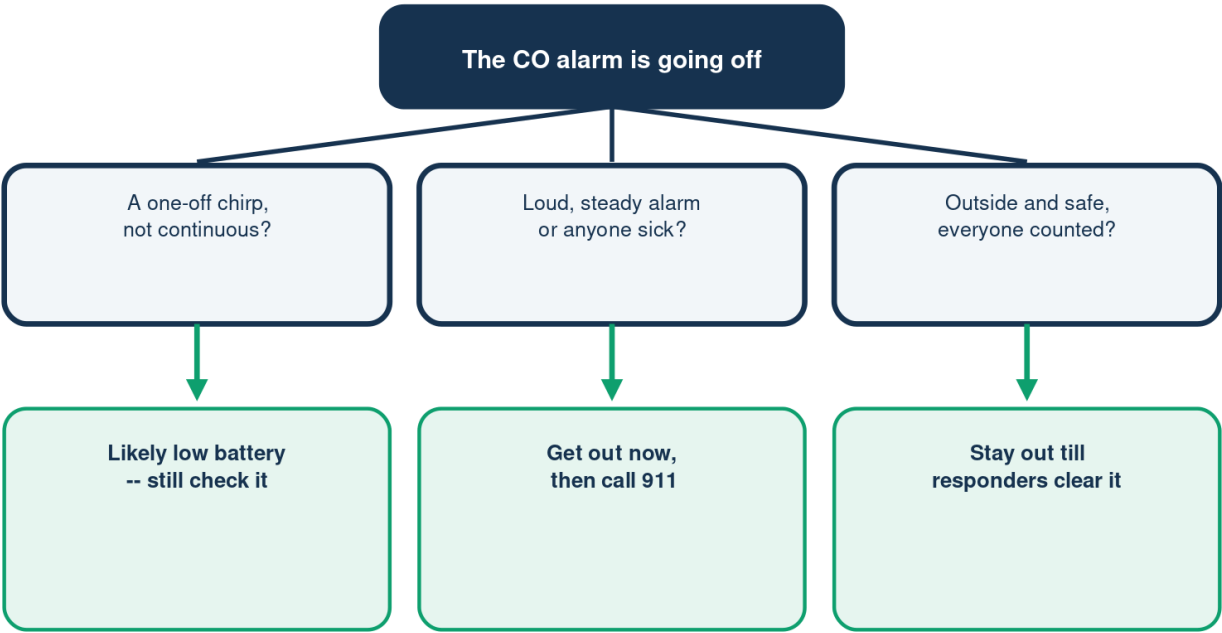
The instinct to resist, and the move that keeps you safe

	Do	Don't
First move	Get outside	Open windows
The cause	Leave it be	Hunt for it
Your stuff	Leave it	Go back for it
Going back	Wait outside	Slip back in
Feeling ok	Still get out	Assume you're safe

When in doubt, get out and stay out.

The Alarm Is Sounding -- What Now?

Let the sound decide, then act



Not sure if it's a chirp or an alarm? Treat it as an alarm and get out.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness, no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



Book a visit —
billshometech.com/book

Use of these guides is subject to our Terms of Use (billshometech.com/terms-of-use).

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

For general information only — not professional advice. Use at your own risk. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech