

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Department, Fire Department and Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy Announce Start of CO Detector Ordinance

BALTIMORE, MD (February 23, 2010) – Beginning on March 1, Baltimore City will require carbon monoxide (CO) detectors to be installed in residential dwellings, hotels and buildings used for living or sleeping. Today, Baltimore City Health and Fire officials joined with The Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP), based at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, to warn residents of the health dangers of CO poisoning, to share prevention tips and to urge compliance with the new law. Since 2000, more than 25 people have died in Baltimore City as a result of CO poisoning.

“Studies have shown that cities with CO detector ordinances have lower reported case fatality rates than in cities without ordinances. We thank the city council for passing this important ordinance requiring CO detectors installed in all city dwellings, helping us keep our families safe,” said Interim City Health Commissioner Olivia Farrow.

City Councilman James Kraft (District 1) sponsored the ordinance, which requires the installation and maintenance of carbon monoxide alarms in all new and existing residential dwellings, hotels, motels, boarding or rooming houses, or other structures where people live or sleep. The law applies to dwellings that use gas- or fossil fuel-burning furnaces or appliances. Residents should take care to follow manufacturer specifications when installing a new alarm to ensure effective protection.

“I cannot emphasize enough how prevention is essential. All poisonings from CO are easily preventable with CO detectors, and this ordinance is therefore designed to save lives,” the councilman said. The ordinance follows the February 13th sickening of six passengers on a cruise ship docked in Baltimore.

Because CO is odorless and colorless, safeguards such as home CO detectors are essential in detecting leaks before they cause symptoms. Mild CO poisoning can cause nausea, headaches or shortness of breath; prolonged exposure to CO can cause dizziness, confusion, severe headaches, severe nausea, faintness, and death if treatment is not sought. Malfunctioning furnaces and other appliances that burn fuels are common culprits of home CO leaks. From 2008 through 2009, the Baltimore City Fire Department responded to more than 3,600 CO poisoning calls.

“Like many injuries that occur in the home, CO poisoning can be prevented. By installing a CO alarm in the hallway near every separate sleeping area of their home, people can keep themselves safe,” said Eileen McDonald, director of The Johns Hopkins Children’s Safety Centers, which are run by CIRP.

To speed the conversion of city homes into safer residences, Kidde, a leading manufacturer of residential fire safety products, has donated 250 free CO alarms that will be distributed to City residents who demonstrate financial need. The devices will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis at Johns Hopkins Children’s Safety, located inside Children’s Admitting at the Johns Hopkins Children’s Center. The center is open Monday – Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; the phone number is (410) 614-5587.

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