

Saving Lives in Anchorage

Mike Melchert, Captain
F. X. Nolan, Chief Medical Officer
Anchorage Fire Department
Anchorage, AK

The call: Family perished

In 2005, an entire family died in Anchorage, Alaska when deadly amounts of carbon monoxide leaked into their house in the middle of the night. Their tragic deaths caused a heightened awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning and brought about the passage of a new law making carbon monoxide detectors mandatory.

193 calls found CO in Anchorage homes

So far this year, the Anchorage Fire Department has responded to 580 carbon monoxide calls, 193 of which actually revealed elevated carbon monoxide in the home. Fire officials recommend people have a working carbon monoxide detector in their home. They insist it's not only the law but it can save lives. The tragedy in 2005 also prompted the city's fire department to take another critically important step.

Anchorage first city in U.S. to include Pulse CO-Oximeters in ambulances

The Anchorage Fire Department has added Masimo's Pulse CO-Oximeters to its ambulance units. AFD is hoping the new devices will help save lives throughout the city.

The department says the devices will come in handy for calls where symptoms are vague, letting response teams accurately measure CO levels in the blood in less than 30 seconds. "It will allow us to assess people

suspected of CO exposure in the presence of only vague symptoms," said F. X. Nolan, AFD's chief medical officer. "Airborne CO meters allow us to measure how much CO is in the air, but when we are called to a scene, our first concern is how much CO is in the patient's blood."

"The Rad-57s give us an idea of how much CO is in the body. This helps paramedics and emergency workers determine how badly you've been exposed and guides them in administering the right treatment," said AFD's Captain Mike Melchert. The meters are also being used in Girdwood and in Chugiak. Funding for the new gear came from a federal grant.

Anchorage Fire Department

The Anchorage Fire Department encompasses 12 fire stations and 391 personnel. There are seven Basic Life Support and five Advanced Life Support engine companies, four truck companies, three aeriels, a heavy rescue company and four tankers that serve as front line suppression and EMS response units. Seven Mobile Intensive Care Units, Fire and EMS battalion chiefs complete the 24-hour unit staffing. An additional rescue company and a variety of specialized units, including dive, foam, hazmat, mountain and water rescue are also available through cross-manning. Each engine company serves as a non-transport Basic Life Support unit equipped with a semi-automatic defibrillator to enhance response to cardiac emergencies. The engine companies assist the Department's 66 firefighter/paramedics who provide Advanced Life Support care and transport in conjunction with firefighter/emergency medical technicians.