WRITTEN STATEMENT OF

ALAN KORN,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,

SAFE KIDS USA

ON

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING PREVENTION

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Subcommittee Hearing

Subcommittee on Consumer Protection,
Product Safety & Insurance
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee

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My name is Alan Korn, and I am the Executive Director of Safe Kids USA, a member country of Safe Kids Worldwide. Safe Kids thanks the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety and Insurance, and in particular Senator Pryor and Senator Klobuchar for holding a hearing on carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning prevention.

I. History of Safe Kids Worldwide

Safe Kids Worldwide is the first and only international organization dedicated solely to addressing an often under recognized problem: ***More children ages 1 – 14 in the U.S. are being killed by what people call "accidents" (motor vehicle crashes, fires, drownings and other injuries) than by any other cause***. Safe Kids Worldwide unites more than 600 coalitions in 19 countries, bringing together health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, policymakers and volunteers to educate and protect families against the dangers of accidental injuries. Our USA network includes coalitions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Founded in 1987 by the Children's National Medical Center and with support from Johnson & Johnson, Safe Kids Worldwide and its member country, Safe Kids USA, rely on developing injury prevention strategies that work in the real world – conducting public outreach and awareness campaigns, organizing and implementing hands-on grassroots events, and working to make injury prevention a public policy priority.

The ongoing work of Safe Kids coalitions reaching out to local communities with injury prevention messages has contributed to a decline in the childhood unintentional injury death rate by 45 percent since 1987. However, with more children still dying from accidental injury than from cancer, heart disease and birth defects, Safe Kids Worldwide, Safe Kids USA and its fellow member countries remain committed to reducing unintentional injury by implementing prevention strategies and increasing public awareness of the problem and its solutions.

II. The Problem: Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is often called the "silent killer" since you cannot see it, smell it or taste it. This colorless, odorless gas is responsible for more than 500 unintentional deaths, approximately 20,000 emergency department visits and more than 4,000 hospitalizations each year in the United States.

Significantly, however, because symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to the flu, food poisonings and other common ailments, it is possible that many deaths have not been classified as CO poisoning and as a result, the number of fatalities, injuries and hospitalizations could be much higher than reported. CO is produced when any fuel is incompletely burned – potentially resulting in flu-like illnesses, such as dizziness, fatigue, headaches, nausea, and irregular breathing. Common fuel-burning appliances, like furnaces, stoves, fireplaces, clothes dryers, water heaters, and space heaters can produce lethal amounts of CO under certain conditions. Motor vehicles are another common source.

Young children are especially vulnerable to the effects of CO. They are more susceptible to carbon monoxide and may experience symptoms sooner than a healthy adult. Due to their smaller bodies, children process CO differently than adults and may be more severely affected by carbon monoxide in their blood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1999-2004, 135 children ages 14 and under died from unintentional, non-fire related CO poisoning. Every year, more than 25 children ages 14 and under die from unintentional CO poisoning.

Regardless of who is affected by CO, the treatment for CO is the same – oxygen therapy to treat symptoms and to lower carbon monoxide levels in the blood or the use of a full-body hyperbaric chamber that applies air pressure to remove the carbon monoxide faster. For those who survive a carbon monoxide poisoning, the long-term effects can be severe. Victims have reported memory loss, impaired motor skills and heart and lung problems. Often times, they deal with the CO injury for the rest of their lives.

III. The Solution: Installation of Carbon Monoxide Alarms & Other Prevention Tips

A. Installing Carbon Monoxide Alarms Is a Must in Many Types of Homes

The frustrating thing about CO poisonings is that many of these incidents can be prevented. The single most effective safety device available to reduce injuries and fatalities related to carbon monoxide poisonings is a CO alarm. A CO alarm in the home can give families an early warning when concentrations of carbon monoxide reach dangerous levels. It is estimated that CO alarms may prevent half of such related deaths from occurring. CO alarms are not only life-saving devices, they are also cost effective. A CO alarm costs as little as $20, about the same as two movie tickets. Since many CO alarms should be replaced every seven years, this cost equals less than a penny a day. A very small price given the protection they provide.

An improperly installed or poorly maintained CO alarm is often an ineffective alarm. Homeowners should always follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation. Safe Kids, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and other injury prevention organizations recommend that a CO alarm be installed in the hallway outside the bedrooms in each separate sleeping area of the home. Safe Kids also recommends that an alarm be installed on each level of the home to ensure proper detection coverage. To avoid false alarms, however, do not place the device in kitchens above fuel burning appliances. Hard-wired or plug in alarms should always

have battery-back up and/or separate additional alarms that are battery operated just in case power is lost in the home. Check your CO alarm each month and replace the batteries every year when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.

B. Other Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Tips

Safe Kids USA and its network have long worked to educate parents across the country on the need for rapid detection of carbon monoxide and have distributed CO alarms to countless families in need. Safe Kids knows, however, that installing CO alarms is not enough. All homeowners who live in residences with a source of combustible fuel or an attached garage, especially those homes with children, should always follow these additional, basic, prevention tips:

1. Never, ever ignore a CO detector that is alarming. It is warning you of the presence of a very dangerous poison. Do not try and find the source of the CO. Immediately go outside to fresh air and then call 9-1-1. Once outside, at your pre-determined, designated meeting place, do a head count to check if all persons are accounted for. Do not go back inside until you are given the "all clear" from the professionals;

2. Never leave a running vehicle closely adjacent to a home or in an attached garage even if the garage is open. Running cars are a common source of CO poisoning;

3. Make sure appliances are installed and operated according to manufacturer's instructions and have heating systems like gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ranges and ovens, gas or kerosene space heaters and fireplaces professionally checked and serviced annually to ensure proper operation. Make certain that flues and chimneys are connected, in good condition and not blocked;

4. Never burn charcoal inside a home, garage, vehicle or tent. The same goes for portable generators that are often used when there is a power loss (i.e., like during a hurricane). Generators should be used outside and placed at a safe distance from the home; and

5. Never use gas appliances such as ranges, ovens, or clothes dryers to heat your home.

IV. Support for State Carbon Monoxide Alarm Laws

Safe Kids knows that the installation of carbon monoxide alarms will go a long way to protecting children and their families from the dangers associated with CO. Safe Kids and our network of coalitions have strongly advocated for the passage of these state laws requiring residential CO alarms in order to properly protect entire families from this silent killer.

Currently, 23 states and some local jurisdictions have passed legislation requiring the use of CO alarms in some types of residences (Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois,

Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin). These laws have proven to be effective. One study shows a dramatic correlation between CO alarm ordinances in cities and lower death rates from CO. In Los Angeles, where CO alarms are not mandatory, 15 percent of CO exposures were fatal. Compare this to Chicago, where CO alarms are required and only 0.4 percent of people exposed to carbon monoxide died.

Safe Kids notes that the existing 23 laws mentioned above are a patchwork of requirements. Some states only require a CO alarm in newly constructed homes (Florida, Connecticut and Georgia). Others require a CO alarm installation when the home is sold or otherwise transferred or remodeled (New Jersey, Maine and Vermont). Some just apply to rental properties or hotels (North Carolina, Montana, Maine) or day care centers (Tennessee and Texas). Only six approach the safety coverage that we think is appropriate given the insidious nature of the poison (Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Rhode Island and Wisconsin). Clearly, there are safety gaps in coverage around the country that need to be closed. Specifically, all dwellings, no matter what the type, should have a CO alarm if the dwelling relies on the combustion of fossil fuels for heat, power or if the home has an attached garage. Safe Kids hopes that the incentive grant program contained in the pending law as discussed and improved below, would motivate that comprehensive coverage around the country (See Section V(A) below).

V. Support for the *Residential Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act* (S. 1216 and H.R. 1296)

Safe Kids USA strongly supports the *Residential Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act.* (S. 1216 and H.R. 1296). We applaud the leadership of the legislation's sponsors, Senator Amy Klobuchar, Senator Ben Nelson and Representative Jim Matheson in the House of Representatives, for the introduction of this critical safety measure which will help prevent the potentially deadly effects of CO poisoning.

A. State Incentive Grant Program for CO Alarms

If passed, the *Residential Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act* would establish an incentive grant program to encourage states to pass CO alarm laws that require approved CO alarms be installed in all commercial dwelling units and all new dwelling unit construction. We know that congressional incentive grants to encourage states to pass safety legislation are not a new concept and have worked in the past. Congress has used this mechanism to promote state transportation safety laws as well as pool safety laws. The passage of the *Residential Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act* could do for CO prevention what incentive grants have done for booster seat child occupant protection laws, primary enforcement safety belt laws, .08 drunk driving laws and open container prohibition laws. In each of these cases, incentive grants motivated states to do the right thing. Today, for instance, all but three states (South Dakota, Florida and Arizona) have some form of a booster seat law and many of these states were motivated by the federal attention.

Safe Kids does note, however, that the legislation as drafted and as mentioned above only applies to commercial dwellings and new construction dwellings. The law does not promote, through the incentive grant program, states to require alarms in single family, existing dwellings. Safe Kids believes that CO alarms obviously serve a very important role in these structures also. In fact, it is more important that these dwellings have these safety devices given that most CO poisonings happen in older, existing homes that have older gas appliances that are more likely to malfunction or fall in disrepair. This Subcommittee and the bill's sponsors should consider adding a requirement that conditions the awarded grant on not only installing CO alarms in commercial dwellings and new construction, but also existing, single family homes. Safety will be well served by this addition.

B. Mandatory Safety Standard for Carbon Monoxide Alarms

The legislation would also ensure the quality of CO alarms available for sale in the marketplace by requiring a mandatory safety standard for these devices. Presently, CO alarms sold are only subject to a voluntary standard. There is no requirement that they meet basic safety characteristics. We believe they should. Parents (and all homeowners for that matter) rely on these devices to serve a critical safety purpose – to alarm before CO amounts reach dangerous levels. Given this special reliance, consumers should be completely confident that they work as purported. A mandatory standard, with its accompanying and heightened government policing, will supply that confidence.

Congress, the Senate Commerce Committee and federal agencies of jurisdiction have agreed with and implemented this philosophy on many occasions. Products of special characteristics or that serve a safety purpose that, in the past, have only been subject to a voluntary standard are now (or soon will be) subject to a mandatory standard. Those products include, bike helmets (pursuant to the *Consumer Product Safety Act*), pool and spa drain covers (pursuant to the *Virginia Graeme Baker Pool & Spa Safety Act*), and toys, ATVs, cribs, baby bath seats, play yards, and bassinets (pursuant to the *Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act*). Carbon monoxide alarms share these special characteristics and, therefore, should be subject to a mandatory standard.

Significantly, Congress has recently addressed and supported this very concept. In the recently passed CPSC Reauthorization legislation, the Conferees on that law stated:

> *The Conferees support carbon monoxide devices being installed in all residential dwelling units and support the efforts of individual states that have enacted legislation requiring the installation of carbon monoxide devices in homes and other dwelling places. The Conferees believe the CPSC should consider the adoption of the American national Standards Institute/Underwriters Laboratories standards ANSI/UL 2034…for carbon monoxide devices sold in the United States…..* (Emphasis added.)

The pending *Residential Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Prevention Act* is completely consistent with that past Congressional directive. Passage of the law will accomplish it.

VI. Conclusion

As carbon monoxide-related injuries and deaths can easily be prevented, parents, caregivers, state and federal policy makers, and communities must make this issue a priority. Safe Kids commends Senator Klobuchar and Senator Nelson, along with the other members of this subcommittee, for promoting awareness of this hidden hazard to the public. We look forward to working with you on any efforts designed to protect children from poisoning-related injury and death.