Poisoned at School

103 CO Incidents, Hundreds of Children Hospitalized

CO SAFE SCHOOLS

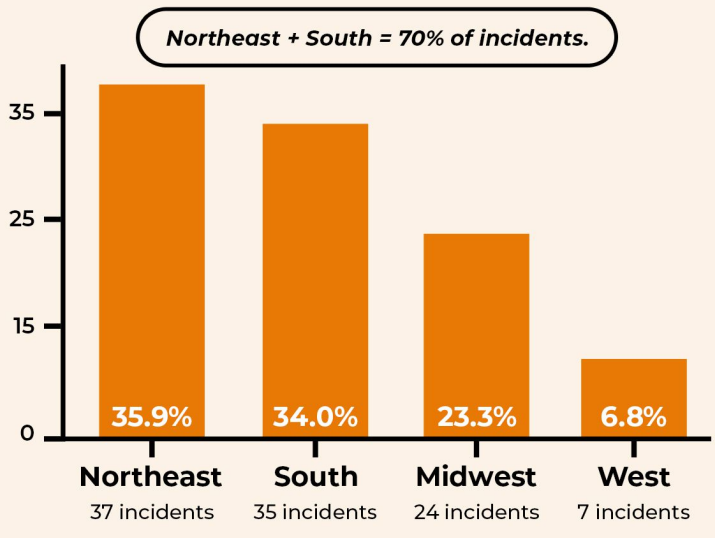
A five-year snapshot of carbon monoxide incidents in U.S. daycares, K–12 schools, and college campuses.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is invisible, odorless, and deadly — and it is poisoning students and staff inside America's schools. Over the past five academic years, 103 press-reported CO incidents have occurred in daycares, elementary schools, high schools, and college campuses nationwide. These events led to hundreds of hospitalizations and at least three deaths. The majority of buildings lacked reliable detection. This Impact Brief provides a clear snapshot of where and why these incidents happen, and why urgent action is needed to protect our nation's students, educators, and families.

By Region Snapshot

While the Northeast leads the nation in campus-related carbon monoxide poisonings with 37 incidents, the South follows closely behind at 35 incidents, indicating carbon monoxide is not just "a cold-weather problem".

Regional distribution based on the US Census Bureau geographic regions.



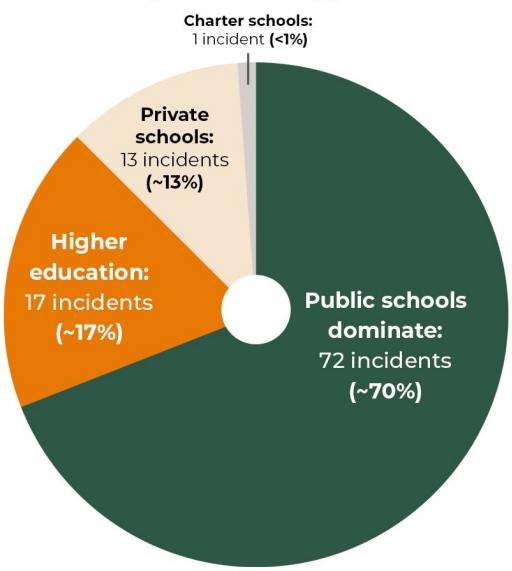
By State Snapshot

Texas leads the nation with **11 incidents (10.7%)** in 5 years. Texas, along with Massachusetts + New York + Connecticut, accounts for **33% of all incidents nationwide.** From Maine to California, incidents were reported in over 30 states + D.C., underscoring that CO is a nationwide risk.

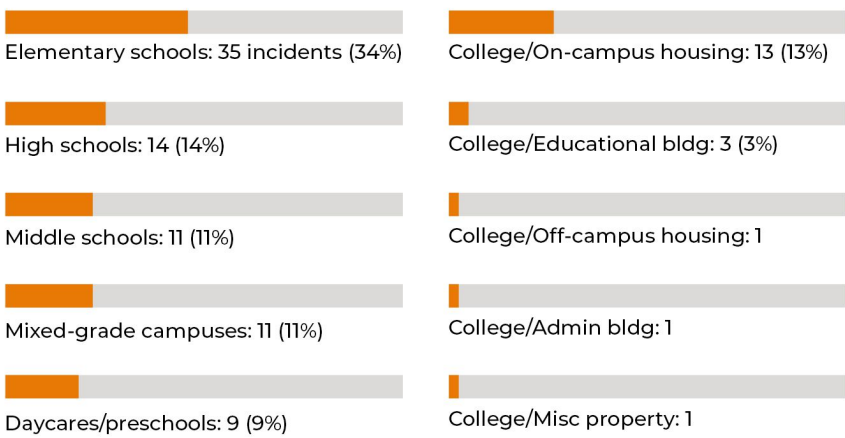
Campus Types Snapshot

Public schools bear the brunt of CO incidents, with nearly **70% of cases.** Elementary schools alone account for a third of all school-related CO poisonings. Daycares and preschools (serving the youngest, most vulnerable population) saw nearly 1 in 10 incidents. College campuses face unique risks, with 13 cases in dorms/on campus housing alone where students sleep. From daycares to dorms — no age group is exempt from CO risk.

By School Type



By School Kind



Other properties (transportation, assemblies, mixed use): handful of cases (<3% each)

Detection Status Snapshot

One of the biggest blind spots discovered in our data: detection status was not reported to the public, leaving occupants and community members in the dark about where and when they are protected. Based on the incident reports, only 1 in 5 incidents had alarms that were installed and worked.

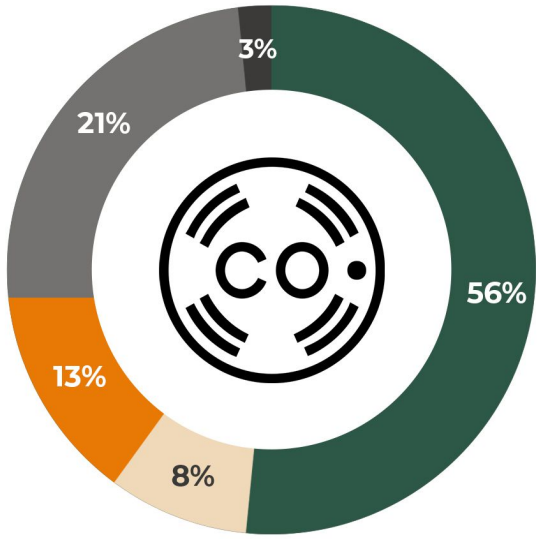
58 of 103 incidents (56%)
— detection status wasn't even reported.

Only 22 incidents (21%)
had alarms installed and working.

13 incidents (13%)
had no alarms installed at all.

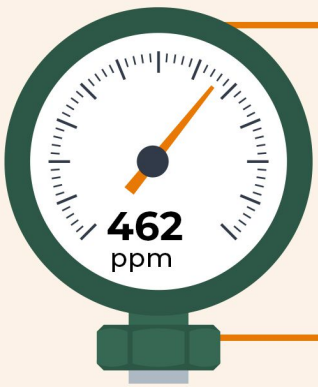
8 incidents (8%)
had alarms installed, but they failed to alert.

3 incidents (3%)
were caught only because a personal portable alarm went off.



Accumulation Level (PPM) Snapshot

Carbon monoxide accumulation is measured in parts per million (ppm). Reporting the highest known level of ppm recorded by gas meters or detection devices allows the public to know the level of exposure the occupants were subjected to, and for occupants to make additional decisions about their healthcare needs. Even limited reporting shows dangerously high levels.



There was a 462 ppm average in the 14 incidents where PPM was reported. The other incidents did not inform the public of the amount of carbon monoxide to which they were exposed.

CO Source Snapshot

Nearly 70% of incidents traced back to fixed or portable equipment — highlighting the need for detection, inspection, and training – not luck. Building-level ventilation failures were responsible for nearly 1 in 10 cases, showing building design and upkeep as key risk factors. Most causes are known and preventable, yet CO detection lags.

Fixed Sources (installed appliances, HVAC, boilers, etc.): **45 cases (44%)**

Portable Sources (generators, vehicles, gas-powered equipment): **25 cases (24%)**

Environmental (e.g., fire-related): **1 case (1%)**

Ventilation Failures (building-level, not appliances): **8 cases (8%)**

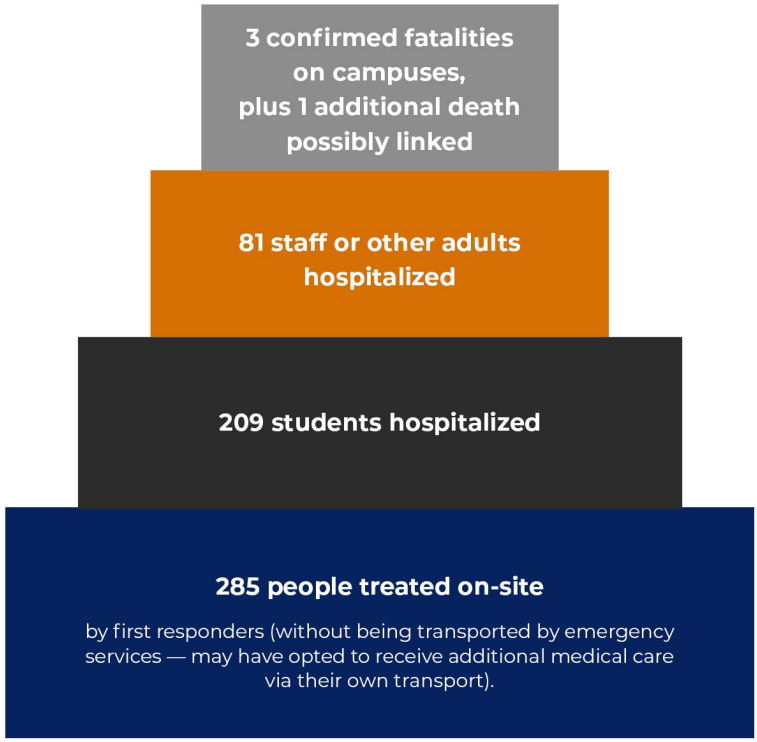
Unspecified/Not reported: **24 cases (23%)**

Injury and Fatality Snapshot

There were **579 people injured by carbon monoxide** on campuses in the last 5 years, including more than 200 student hospitalizations. These numbers don't even count the thousands evacuated. **Every carbon monoxide incident is a mass casualty risk** where dozens are being treated at once. Today, children, staff, and educators are being poisoned in the very buildings meant to protect them.

Out of 579 injuries:

- 49% of injuries treated on site
- 36% of injuries were student hospitalizations
- 14% were staff or adult hospitalizations
- At least 3 CO-related fatalities on the property



Citation: nikkijzellner

Data for this Snapshot was collected and recorded by CO Safe Schools and Nikki James Zellner from press-reported incidents from Academic Years beginning in August of 2020 and ending in July 2025.

Individual incident reporting can be found in the Airtable located at www.CarbonMonoxideInSchools.org/victims, and a full incident list can be provided via email upon request.

For media or press inquiries, please reach out to: Nikki James Zellner, Founder of CO Safe Schools, at info@carbonmonoxideinschools.org

Further Sources:

https://www.carbonmonoxideinschools.org/victims
https://airtable.com/appZOg9CjzxZjcXHJ/shrF4OTI0dqk1bsVf/tblQPJJ03u07y6gfQ/viwGixwLVzHz6vilT (all further sources country and date wise mentioned inside the link)
https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/14-construction-workers-renovating-yale-building-are-hospitalized-for-carbon-monoxide-poisoning/
https://www.fox10tv.com/2025/03/04/12-taken-hospital-after-feeling-nauseous-middle-school-district-searches-cause/
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https://www.carbonmonoxideinschools.org/press