New Report Reveals 103 Carbon Monoxide Incidents Poisoned Hundreds at U.S. Schools Over Five Years

Texas Leads Nation in School-Based CO Incidents; Over 200 students from daycares, K-12, and college campuses treated at hospitals

The Zellner brothers were two of eighty children poisoned at their Virginia daycare in 2020. Their mom, Nikki James Zellner, later went on to start CO Safe Schools, and continues to advocate for CO alarm requirements in daycares, K-12, and college campuse

MADISON, AL, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2025 / EINPresswire.com/ -- An analysis of U.S. media coverage reveals that at least 103 carbon monoxide incidents occurred at U.S. daycares, K-12 schools, and college campuses between August 2020 and July 2025, resulting in 579 injuries, more than 200 student hospitalizations, and at least three confirmed deaths on campuses.

The report, "Poisoned at School: The Five-Year Snapshot," released today by CO Safe Schools, found that public schools bore the brunt of carbon monoxide poisonings, accounting for nearly 70% of all cases.

"Every number represents a child or staff member whose life was put at risk by preventable carbon monoxide exposure," said Nikki James Zellner, founder of CO Safe Schools. "These incidents are entirely preventable, yet we're seeing them occur nationwide due to aging systems, lack of adequate detection systems, and lack of situational training."

Regional Distribution Defies Assumptions
While the Northeast led with 37 incidents (35.9%), the South followed closely with 35 incidents (34.0%), dispelling the notion that carbon monoxide is a "Northern problem." Texas led all states with 11 incidents over a five-year period.

The Midwest recorded 24 incidents (23.3%), while the West had seven incidents (6.8%).

Combined, Texas, Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut accounted for 33% of all incidents nationwide.

Elementary Schools Face Highest Risk
Elementary schools experienced 35 cases (34% of all school-related poisonings), while high schools recorded 14 incidents (14%). Daycares and preschools saw nine incidents (9%). College campuses had 13 incidents in on-campus housing where students sleep.

Detection "Blind Spots"
The most alarming finding was the widespread lack of reliable carbon monoxide detection. In 56% of incidents, the detection status wasn't reported to the public. Among cases where information was available:
• Only 22 incidents (21%) had alarms installed and working properly
• 13 incidents (13%) occurred at facilities with no alarms installed
• Eight incidents (8%) had alarms installed that failed to alert occupants
• Three incidents (3%) were discovered only because someone had a personal portable alarm

"Without working and properly installed detection systems, schools are essentially flying blind when it comes to carbon monoxide protection," Zellner said.

Incident Sources Vary Greatly
Nearly 70% of incidents are traced back to fixed or portable fuel-fired equipment. The breakdown included:
• Fixed sources (e.g., HVAC systems, boilers, installed appliances): 45 cases (44%)
• Portable sources (e.g., generators, vehicles, gas-powered equipment): 25 cases (24%)
• Ventilation failures (like building-level air pressure issues): 8 cases (8%)
• Unspecified or unreported sources: 24 cases (23%)

Dangerous Exposure Levels Documented
When carbon monoxide levels were reported (only 14 of 103 incidents) the average concentration was 462 parts per million (ppm). Exposure to 400 ppm can be life-threatening in less than three hours.

"The other 89 incidents didn't inform families about exposure levels, leaving them unable to make informed healthcare decisions," Zellner said.

Mass Casualty Events Strain Resources
Carbon monoxide incidents in educational settings are inherently mass casualty events. In the reporting reviewed, 285 people were treated on-site by first responders, and over 290 individuals were treated at hospitals. Thousands more were evacuated but declined medical treatment.

Call for Immediate Action
"These are the incidents we know about," Zellner adds. "Many other incidents exist, but are

either not reported by the media, are misdiagnosed as seasonal illnesses, or aren't specifically mentioning carbon monoxide as the reason for a school's evacuation or closure."
CO Safe Schools calls for:

Installation of carbon monoxide alarms or detection systems in all daycare, PK-12, and college campus buildings
Increased frequency of inspections and maintenance of all fuel-burning appliances
Staff training on carbon monoxide recognition and response
More informed public reporting of detection system status, accumulation levels, and incidents

Additional Info:
"Poisoned at School: The Five-Year Snapshot" analyzed U.S. press reports of carbon monoxide incidents at educational and caregiving facilities from August 2020 through July 2025, including a systematic review of news coverage and emergency response reports when made available to the public.

The full report is available at CarbonMonoxideInSchools.org/five-year-snapshot

CO Safe Schools is a grassroots project founded by Nikki James Zellner after her two sons survived carbon monoxide poisoning at their daycare. The project works to strengthen carbon monoxide detection requirements in educational settings and successfully advocated for strengthened detection laws in Virginia in 2021

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