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Carbon Monoxide

I am Carbon Monoxide and I share planet earth with you. You all call me “The silent killer”, “The odorless menace”. I do have a good side, however, you folks don’t use it. I can be a warning to you, if you use a friend of mine, the CO detector. This detector will warn you of my presence before I can harm you, and alert you to keep all your appliances tuned, inspected and serviced on an annual basis.

Frequently we hear how carbon monoxide is so deadly. However, statistics show that carbon monoxide is not even close to being a leading cause of death. It actually accounts for only .0002%(500 deaths a year) of deaths in America, where as low-level CO poisoning affects tens of thousands of people each year.

What needs to be emphasized is the danger of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning. It has been known for many years that CO poisoning can produce lasting health harm, mainly though its destructive effects on the central nervous system. An emerging body of evidence suggests that longer exposures to lower levels of CO are capable of producing a myriad of debilitating residual effects that may continue for days, weeks, months and even years.

Confusion about gas appliances and their potential to produce CO in our homes is alarming. One source, such as Home and Garden T.V. (HGTV), states on their website that “gas log fireplaces are maintenance free.” Yet the manufacture warnings read: Fire hazard. Do not disassemble or attempt repair of this unit. Disassembly, reassembly or internal adjustment could cause the valve to malfunction, resulting in personal injury, death or property damage. In my line of business, I have seen this warning violated, and hundreds of people suffering from low-level CO poisoning.

The liability for failure to maintain gas appliances can be devastating to lives and cause overwhelming financial loss. A recent court report from Minnesota tells of a broker being liable for the carbon monoxide deaths of two children. The lawsuit alleged that the sellers and the sellers’ salesperson knew the furnace was faulty but neglected to warn the buyers. The AAMD lawyer, Andrew Hamrick, states that once a property employee is notified of a faulty appliance the property manager has 72 hours to initiate repair.

Some symptoms of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning are as follows: headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, nauseated, faint, and shortness of breath. Since many of these symptoms are similar to those of the flu, food poisoning, or other illnesses, one may not think that CO poisoning could be the cause.

Here are some suggestions to help prevent CO poisoning:

- Annual service of all gas appliances and wood burning fireplaces.
- Resident should be given a guideline on what to expect from their appliances, and its proper usage.
- Leave a window slightly open all year round, two would be better!
- Install at least two CO detectors in the property.

We’re trained in carbon monoxide and combustion safety, and appliance venting.

References: Carbon Monoxide Headquarters Wayne State University; EPA