

# The Dangers of Carbon Monoxide

Ideally, natural gas burns in an appliance completely and efficiently, mixing with the oxygen in the air to produce harmless carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and water vapor. But if conditions aren't right, the natural gas won't combust completely, giving off deadly fumes of carbon monoxide (CO).

An appliance could produce carbon monoxide if:

- Boxes, laundry or other materials are blocking the base, restricting oxygen flow.
- The vent hood, pipes or flues are blocked, cracked or corroded.
- It's installed or adjusted improperly.
- It's used incorrectly (i.e., heating a room with a gas stove).

Don't:

- Use a gas range to heat your home.
- Operate a vehicle, lawn mower or grill in a closed garage or use an outdoor grill inside the home.
- Operate a generator inside your home, garage or other enclosed building.
- Sleep in a room with an unvented gas or kerosene space heater.
- Use a wood-burning fireplace and furnace simultaneously for long periods of time.

When humans (and pets) breathe in carbon monoxide, it enters the bloodstream and depletes oxygen from the blood cells. If exposure continues over a long period of time (overnight, for example), it can cause brain damage or even death. Carbon monoxide can be especially dangerous during the winter, when our homes are closed up.

The symptoms of CO poisoning mimic the flu, so watch out for these warning signs:

- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or disorientation
- Muscle weakness or fatigue
- Difficulty waking

If the flu-like symptoms are not accompanied by fever, if everyone in the family is ill, or if the symptoms disappear when you leave the house, you might have a CO problem in your home. Have your appliances checked by a professional right away. You can prevent CO poisoning by using your appliances correctly and keeping them well-maintained, and by installing a quality CO detector in your home. Carbon monoxide rises because it's lighter than air, so place the detector in upper levels of your home near bedrooms or sleeping areas. If your CO detector's alarm sounds, open window and doors, and check

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## Public Awareness Information Sheets

the pilot lights on all appliances. If the alarm continues to sound, shut off all appliances, leave the house and call Facilities Management immediately.