

## **“DO YOU HAVE THE FLU OR CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING?”**

A professional inspection of all gas equipment in your home could save your life and the lives of your loved ones. Flu and bad cold symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, pains and mental confusion may actually be caused by gases in your home.

There are two kinds of dangerous gas that can leak into your home. One you can smell, and one you can't smell.

You probably know that if you “smell gas” you should immediately shut down your furnace, heater, or cook stove and call for help. This is the gas that is delivered to your home from the gas company through the pipeline or from your propane tank. There is a special chemical put into these gases to make them smell like rotten eggs so you will be sure and notice if there is a leak. If either of these gases were to build up in your home, it could explode and destroy your home.

The other dangerous gas is actually produced inside your home. It is produced by incomplete combustion or poor ventilation of fuel-burning appliances such as oil or gas furnaces, gas cooking appliances, water heaters, fireplaces or wood stoves. This gas is the same toxic gas that comes out of the tail pipe of your car if you leave it in a closed garage with the engine running. It is called carbon monoxide. You can not smell it. Even though carbon monoxide will not explode, it can be dangerous (even deadly) to you and your family.

Two common sources of carbon monoxide in Texas homes are the gas furnace heat exchanger and the gas hot water heater. As homes have been built to be more energy efficient, they have fewer places where fresh air can leak into the home. In order for fuel-burning equipment to operate correctly and safely, it must have a source of fresh air for complete combustion. If the fresh air is not available, the equipment will pull the combustion gases back into the house rather than exhausting them up the flue.

Things you can do to protect yourself and family are:

1. Have your furnace checked and adjusted by a professional to be sure the burner and vent systems are operating properly and that the heat exchanger has no cracks.
2. Visually inspect the area around your furnace to make sure there is enough air flow for the burner to bring in fresh air. The furnace should not be in a tightly sealed space.
3. Inspect both the water heater and furnace flue for internal obstruction or leaks around the joints.
4. Test a gas water heater while the burner is on by holding a lighted match under the draft hood. A match that flickers downward or goes out may indicate an exhaust backflow. The flame of the match should burn upward toward the flue.

5. Burn fireplace or wood stove with the damper open so that all combustion gases will flow to the outside.
6. Secure carbon monoxide detectors and place at least one near the sleeping area, and others near the fireplace, furnace and near any other fuel burning appliances.
7. Select a detector that has Consumer Product Safety Commission and Underwriters Laboratories' seals of approval.
8. If a carbon monoxide detector activates, call the fire department. They have sensing equipment to determine where dangerous levels of carbon monoxide are located. Since home detectors are made to alert before the environment is hazardous, this gives the homeowner a chance to contact appropriate service personnel to "fix" the problem.
9. If any person in the area when the alarm sounds has an extreme headache, nausea, flu-like symptoms or disorientation, they should be transported to the nearest emergency care facility and checked for carbon monoxide poisoning.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.