

# NEWS from CPSC

## U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

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### ***Install a carbon monoxide alarm in your home*** **CPSC Urges Annual Furnace Inspection to Prevent CO Deaths**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the weather turns colder, consumers need to be aware of an invisible killer that can seep through the home, causing serious injury or death. In Benton Harbor, Mich., three family members were hospitalized due to carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a malfunctioning furnace or gas water heater. In Salt Lake City, Utah, a man was hospitalized with carbon monoxide poisoning after the furnace in his condominium malfunctioned. These incidents are not old news; they occurred just last month.

To help prevent carbon monoxide (CO) poisonings, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) urges consumers to have a professional inspection of all fuel-burning heating systems, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, water heaters, space heaters, chimneys, flues, and vents.

"Each year, CO poisoning from heating systems, water heaters, and ranges and ovens kills about 80 people in the U.S.," said CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton. "Many of these tragedies could be prevented by having a professional check these appliances annually for proper operation and CO leaks."

CO is a colorless, odorless gas that can be produced by burning fuels such as natural gas, propane, oil, kerosene, coal, or wood. Properly installed and operating fuel-burning appliances pose minimal CO hazards. However, under certain conditions, all appliances that burn fuels can leak deadly levels of CO into the home. The initial symptoms of CO poisoning are similar to flu (but without the fever) and include headache, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea and dizziness. Exposure to high levels of CO can cause death.

CPSC recommends that the yearly professional inspection include checking chimneys, flues and vents for leakage, blockage by debris, and to make sure they are not loose or disconnected. Birds, other animals and insects can build nests in vents over spring and summer, resulting in blockages that cause deadly exhaust to enter the home. The inspector should also check appliance operation to ensure proper fuel input rate, gas pressure, and operating temperatures.

In addition, the inspector should check appliances for gas leaks and adequate ventilation. A supply of fresh air is important to help carry pollutants up the chimney, stovepipe or flue, and fresh air is necessary for the complete combustion of any fuel. Never block ventilation air openings and check the appliance filter to ensure it is clean. Make sure the appliance is operating on the fuel that it is designed to use. To convert an appliance to burn propane, hire a professional to do the modification.

"CPSC recommends that every home have a CO alarm in the hallway near bedrooms in each sleeping area," said Chairman Stratton. "A CO alarm can wake you up and give you time to save your family." The CO alarm should meet one of these standards: Canadian Standards Association 6.19-01, 2001; Underwriters Laboratories Inc. 2034, Second Edition, October 1998; or the International Approval Services 6-96, Second Edition, June 1, 1998. Check batteries monthly and replace them annually.

CPSC worked with the furnace and boiler industry and the manufacturers of high-temperature plastic vent (HTPV) pipes to conduct a vent pipe recall program. The program's purpose is to replace, free, an estimated 250,000 HTPV pipe systems attached to gas or propane furnaces or boilers in consumers' homes. The HTPV pipes could crack or separate at the joints and leak CO. Consumers should call the HTPV pipe recall Hotline toll-free at (800) 758-3688, between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. ET, seven days a week, to verify whether their appliance venting systems are subject to this program.

CPSC staff continues to work with the furnace industry and other interested parties to develop new technologies to address the hazards of CO poisoning and fire. Results include a furnace voluntary standard that includes requirements for blocked-vent shut-off devices to protect against blocked vent pipes and chimneys, and vented heater requirements to guard against a vent pipe becoming separated from the furnace. Both conditions could lead to CO poisonings. Although improvements have been made in modern furnaces, they do not protect against all conditions that can lead to CO exposure. All gas-fired furnaces manufactured since 1987 have flame roll-out protection technology that prevents flames from spilling out of the furnace's combustion chamber and starting a fire.

Consumers should never use gasoline-powered generators or charcoal grills indoors or in attached garages because of the risk of CO poisoning: opening doors and windows or operating fans cannot supply adequate ventilation and can be deadly. Use a generator outside in a dry area away from doors, windows, and vents that could allow CO to come indoors. Even with a CO alarm, NEVER use a gasoline-powered generator or a charcoal grill inside.

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[Send the link for this page to a friend!](#) The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from thousands of types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard. The CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters, and household chemicals - contributed significantly to the decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 30 years.

To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, call CPSC's Hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270. To join a CPSC e-mail subscription list, please go to <https://www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.aspx>. Consumers can obtain recall and general safety information by logging on to CPSC's Web site at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).

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