

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS CREDITED WITH SAVING LIVES IN NORTH BAY

Responding to carbon monoxide calls is a regular occurrence for North Bay firefighters. Most of these calls are the result of a dead battery in the carbon monoxide alarm or a CO alarm that has exceeded its expiration date and should be replaced. However, this is not always the case. So far this January, 17 CO calls have been received, 4 of which fire crews confirmed levels of carbon monoxide in the home. The most recent call came from a family who were awakened by their CO alarm shortly after midnight. Firefighters arrived to the home finding the family waiting for them outside, already beginning to feel the effects of CO poisoning. Imagine how different this scenario would read if the family had not had a working carbon monoxide alarm.

In 2009, the City of North Bay passed a By-Law requiring the installation and maintenance of carbon monoxide alarms in all residential occupancies containing a fuel fired appliance and/or having an attached garage.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless, tasteless and toxic gas and is often referred to as the 'silent killer.' When inhaled, it inhibits the blood's capacity to transport oxygen throughout the body. It can poison the body quickly in high concentrations, or slowly over long periods of time. Exposure during sleep is particularly dangerous because the victim does not usually awaken.

Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness or loss of consciousness. In severe cases, CO poisoning can cause brain damage and death.

Carbon monoxide is produced when fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, kerosene, coal, charcoal, gasoline or wood have insufficient air to burn completely. This incomplete combustion can occur in any device that depends on burning for energy or heat, such as furnaces, room heaters, fireplaces, hot water heaters, gas stoves or grills and any gas-powered vehicle or engine.

Fire Chief Grant Love reminds us that "carbon monoxide alarms are a second line of defense; to prevent dangerous levels of carbon monoxide from entering your home, ensure that fuel burning appliances are properly installed, maintained and vented and used appropriately." By educating ourselves on the dangers of carbon monoxide we can significantly reduce the health risk as well as save lives.

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Prevention is the Key to Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- ✓ **DO** have your fuel-burning appliances -- including oil and gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas dryers, gas or kerosene space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves -- inspected by a trained professional at the beginning of every heating season. Make certain that the flues and chimneys are connected, in good condition, and not blocked.
- ✓ **DO** choose appliances that vent their fumes to the outside whenever possible, have them properly installed, and maintain them according to manufacturers' instructions.
- ✓ **DO** read and follow all of the instructions that accompany any fuel-burning device. If you cannot avoid using an unvented gas or kerosene space heater, *carefully follow the cautions* that come with the device. Use the proper fuel and keep doors to the rest of the house open. Crack a window to ensure enough air for ventilation and proper fuel-burning.
- ✓ **DO** clean regularly gas range stove tops, the oven cavity and burners. If the burners are dirty and clogged, the fuel air mixture becomes improperly adjusted causing inefficient combustion. Older appliances may have rust or damage to the burner system which may cause CO. Always maintain your appliance following manufacturers instructions
- ✓ **DO** keep your gas meter and gas appliance exhaust vents free of snow and ice. A blocked vent could result in carbon monoxide problems.

DON'TS...

- ✗ **DON'T** idle the car in a garage -- even if the garage door to the outside is open. Fumes can build up very quickly in the garage and living area of your home.
- ✗ **DON'T** use a gas oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
- ✗ **DON'T** *ever* use a charcoal grill indoors -- even in a fireplace.
- ✗ **DON'T** sleep in any room with an unvented gas or kerosene space heater.
- ✗ **DON'T** use any gasoline-powered engines (mowers, weed trimmers, snow blowers, chain saws, small engines or generators) in enclosed spaces.
- ✗ **DON'T** ignore symptoms, particularly if more than one person is feeling them. You could lose consciousness and die if you do nothing.