

On the Home Front

Bi-monthly column by: Linda Skolnick

Carbon Monoxide - Beware

The weather has turned colder, and there are just a few holdouts left who have not yet turned on their furnace for the frigid months ahead. Whether you have, or just about to power up...make sure that your furnace exhaust system (the chimney and connector pipe), is ready to provide safe and effective service.

According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission , over 200 people across the nation die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by problems in the venting - out of their homes- of toxic gases produced by their heating systems. However, other agencies suggest the actual estimate should be closer to 2,000 to 4,000 people who perish from this disorder. In addition, around 10,000 cases of carbon monoxide related “injuries” are diagnosed each year. Low level carbon monoxide exposure symptoms often mimic the symptoms of a common cold, such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, and depression. Due to the difficulty in diagnosis, the number of people actually effected may even be higher. Infants and the elderly are more susceptible than healthy adults, as are those with anemia and heart disease.

Prevention, however, is the best cure. Have your heating system inspected and maintained annually before or simultaneous to the startup of your heating system.

Why has Carbon Monoxide poisoning become a hot topic recently? For one reason, houses are more air tight than ever. Homeowners are aware of the cost of heating a drafty home, and do their best to seal up windows and doors where air can enter. However, this loss of fresh air coming into the home gives less pathways out of the house for stale polluted air. When furnaces and boilers are starved of the oxygen needed to burn fuels completely, carbon monoxide is produced.

A well tuned furnace or boiler, connected to a venting system or flute that is correctly sized, structurally sound, clean and free of cracks and blockages, will produce a warm and comfortable home. An overlooked heating system can produce illness and possibly death.

Make sure that your chimney is checked by a certified chimney manager. Install carbon monoxide detectors near all bedrooms and regularly used rooms. And get outside...it's good for you!!!

