

## **Get a Jump on the Heating Season**

By Jim Jenson, MGE, for Safe Communities

With winter on the way, it's a good time to contact a professional heating contractor to have your natural gas heating equipment checked for safe and efficient operation. With heating systems typically operating six months of the year in our region, preventative furnace maintenance is as important as maintaining your car. Waiting until your furnace fails can result in costly repairs and even compromise the safety of your family.

Having an annual furnace check up is an excellent way to safeguard against equipment breakdown and spot potential safety problems associated with improper venting of flue gases.

Improper combustion of fossil fuel burning appliances and improper venting may lead to dangerous carbon monoxide concentrations in the house. Carbon monoxide is a byproduct of the combustion process. Often called the "silent killer," due to its odorless, colorless characteristics, carbon monoxide buildup in the house in the right concentration may cause dizziness, sickness or death. You can prevent problems by calling a professional heating contractor and scheduling a tuneup and inspection.

If you ever smell a strong and persistent smell of natural gas, open windows and leave the house immediately. Call your utility's 24-hour emergency gas phone line from a neighbors house and report the problem. Never call from your house. A slight spark may ignite natural gas. Your utility's personnel have the experience and technical expertise to identify and fix gas leaks wherever they occur. Your safety is important, so don't hesitate to call.

### **Natural Gas Safety tips**

- Keep combustibles safe; store papers, fluids, paints, curtains and rags far away from any gas appliance or heat source.
- Install and maintain smoke detectors.
- Make sure gas appliances are installed and vented properly.
- If you smell a strong persistent natural gas odor:
  1. Open windows and doors.
  2. Don't use the phone or electrical devices.
  3. Go to a neighbor's house and call your natural gas utility (see emergency numbers below).
- Keep appliance vents on the outside of your house clear of obstructions.
- Never use your oven or grill to heat your house.
- Don't attempt to relight pilot lights if you lack experience.
- Don't purchase a new gas appliance without checking to make sure it meets strict safety standards.

### **Carbon monoxide (CO) Safety Tips:**

- Install a CO detector. If the alarm sounds, call the emergency number shown below.
- Check that vent hoods and pipes on gas-operated appliances are clear and free of obstructions.
- Have your gas-operated appliances checked annually by a professional.
- Be alert for signs of CO poisoning— dizziness, headache, nausea, abdominal pain and fatigue.
- Don't use your oven or grill to heat your home.

- Don't operate your vehicle in a closed garage.

To report a natural gas or carbon monoxide-related emergency, call:

Alliant Energy Customers  
1-800-862-6261 (24 hours)

Madison Gas and Electric Customers  
608-252-7111 or 1-800-245-1123 (24 hours)

