

## **What You Should Know About Carbon Monoxide**

Whether you heat with wood, oil, gas or coal, your heating system can produce carbon monoxide (CO) if it's not working properly, or if it is not properly vented. Carbon monoxide is a gas that is odorless, colorless and tasteless, but very toxic. Some signs indicating the presence of carbon monoxide in your home are stuffy, stale or smelly air, very high humidity or soot coming from the fireplace or heating system.

### **What are the symptoms of CO Poisoning?**

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often confused with those of the flu, and in fact the highest incidents of poisoning occur during the flu season. These symptoms can include headaches, dizziness, nausea, loss of muscle control, physical weakness and mental confusion. High concentrations of carbon monoxide can lead to unconsciousness, brain damage and death. However a victim may not experience any of these symptoms, or only a few. You should suspect carbon monoxide if the symptoms disappear when you leave your home.

### **What to do if you Suspect CO in Your Home**

If you suspect the presence of carbon monoxide:

- Open windows and doors
- Call your fuel supplier or licensed heating contractor immediately for an emergency inspection.
- If carbon monoxide is detected, seek medical attention immediately.

### **How to Reduce the Risk of CO Poisoning in your Home**

You can reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, have your heating system inspected and serviced by a licensed heating contractor, gas company or fuel supplier, preferably before the heating season begins. Have the service company also check your chimney or vent pipes for blockage. If a blockage exists, contact a professional chimney sweep immediately. It's also a good idea to make sure your home is adequately ventilated, particularly if you have insulated your home, had major renovations done, or enclosed your heating system to increase living space.

*Adapted with permission of the Bay State Gas Co.*