



The **Minnesota Poison Control System** --
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subject: Carbon Monoxide

Minneapolis, Minn. -- With the onset of colder weather, now is the time of year we start heating our homes with furnaces or other heat sources. One of the potential problems associated with our long heating season is possible exposure to carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, and tasteless gas, which is the by-product of incomplete combustion of fossil fuels. Other sources of carbon monoxide production include cars, snowmobiles, snow blowers or any number of fossil fuel-burning engines.

Carbon monoxide interferes with the ability of the red blood cells to bind and transport oxygen to organs and tissue throughout the body. Those organ systems with the highest oxygen requirements (i.e., brain, heart, kidneys) are the most sensitive to the effects of carbon monoxide. Consequently, those persons with pre-existing heart or lung disease are more sensitive to the damaging effects of carbon monoxide. Also, the elderly, very young children and pregnant women are more sensitive to its effects.

Symptoms from carbon monoxide poisoning include: light-headedness, dizziness, headache, nausea and vomiting. In general, mild symptoms very much resemble flu-like illnesses that seem to resolve when one leaves the area. Greater exposures can cause confusion, chest pain, seizures, and coma. If several individuals become ill at the same time and have been exposed to a source of carbon monoxide, you should suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.

If you suspect that you or a family member is being poisoned by carbon monoxide, the following steps need to be done:

- **IMMEDIATELY** dial 9-1-1 if someone is seriously ill.
- Anyone experiencing mild symptoms should call the Minnesota Poison Control System 1-800-222-1222.
- Remove any persons or pets from the environment without putting yourself at risk.
- If a carbon monoxide detector alarm is activated with no persons exhibiting any ill effects, leave the area and call your local gas utility or your local fire department to locate the source.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- **HAVE** one or more carbon monoxide detectors in your home. Place detector(s) near sleeping areas. Detectors with both audible alarms and digital displays are best.
- **DO NOT USE** gas ovens or gas ranges for heating purposes.
- **PROPERLY INSTALL**, operate and regularly maintain all fossil fuel burning appliances.

- **HAVE** professionals service your fuel-burning appliances.
- **DO NOT OPERATE** gasoline-powered engines in confined areas, such as garages or basements.
- **DO NOT BURN** charcoal inside a home, recreational vehicle, or tent.
- **PROVIDE** adequate ventilation for the safe operation of furnaces, wood stoves, space heaters and fireplaces.

The Minnesota Poison Control System is available 24 hours a day to answer any questions. Further information can be found at www.mnpoison.org.

The Minnesota Poison Control System is a cooperative effort between the Minnesota Department of Health and the Hennepin Regional Poison Center. The Hennepin Regional Poison Center, located at Hennepin County Medical Center, is designated by the Minnesota Department of Health to provide poison information and consultative services to the residents and health care providers of Minnesota.

###

CONTACTS: [Kirk Hughes, RN, CSPI, Educator](#)
Hennepin Regional Poison Center
Hennepin County Medical Center
701 Park Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1829
Office: (612) 873-6000
FAX: (612) 904-4289

[Deborah L. Anderson, Pharm.D., Director](#)
Hennepin Regional Poison Center
Hennepin County Medical Center
701 Park Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1829
Office: (612) 873-2107
Fax: (612) 904-4289