

**Family Living
Focus**

Bucks Co.
Extension Agent
Kay Hastings



Healthy Indoor Air
Healthy indoor air is not a luxury, it is a necessity for optimum health and well being for you and your family. Air quality, especially during the winter months when windows and doors are closed and a variety of combustion devices are in operation, can be dangerous. One of the silent culprits is carbon monoxide.
Carbon monoxide is an odor-

less, colorless gas that can be fatal when breathed. It's sometimes difficult to determine if carbon monoxide is the culprit, because its symptoms are similar to flu and allergies. Low levels can cause nausea, dizziness, weakness, and muscle ache. Higher doses can impair judgment, cause paralysis or coma, and death.

Carbon monoxide buildup can occur several ways: when flues or

chimneys become blocked so exhaust cannot be vented to the outside or when a fuel-burning furnace has a cracked or rusted heat exchanger, allowing combustion gases into the living space. Also when fuel-burning space heaters, ovens, ranges or grills are operated in the home without adequate ventilation; when car exhaust from an attached garage enters the home, when combustion equipment is not working properly and causes incomplete combustion, and when there's a negative pressure balance between the inside and outside of the home, preventing adequate venting of combustion gases.

Harmful build-ups of these gases occur when: exhaust from combustion equipment is not vented to the outside of the home, and when combustion equipment is not in good working order and is not regularly inspected for safe operation.

Some homes may have a problem with "backdrafting." That's when the air pressure inside the home is less than the air pressure outside, causing combustion by-products from furnaces, water heaters, fireplaces and similar equipment to spill back into the room rather than being vented outside. Backdrafting can also occur when natural draft appliance exhaust is pulled back into the house by mechanical ventilation — like a down-draft kitchen power vent.

There are carbon monoxide detectors you can install, which will alert you to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. It is important to choose and place a detector wisely and maintain it to assure accurate sensing of carbon monoxide.

Carbon monoxide may be the problem if you feel bad only when you're inside the home and the symptoms gradually disappear after you have left, or if more than

one person in the home has similar symptoms. Remember carbon monoxide related symptoms are similar to those of the flu.

The most important practice is to keep all combustion equipment well-maintained and inspected for safety. Experts recommend having your combustion heating systems inspected by a trained professional every year. Such inspections should look for blocked openings to flues and chimneys, cracked or disconnected flue pipe; signs of soot around openings in your furnace or boiler; rust or cracks in the heat exchange; soot or creosote build-up, and exhaust or gas odors. Always operate combustion equipment for its intended purpose and make sure it has been installed correctly. Never use unvented combustion appliances indoors.

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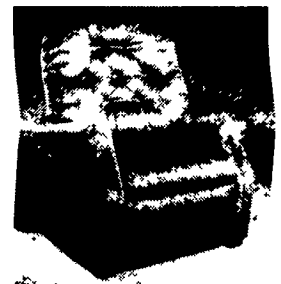
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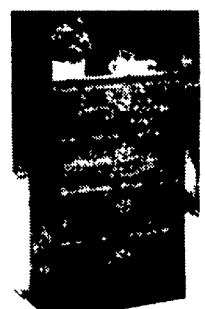
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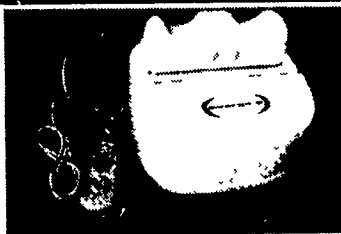
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