

Ask Environmental Health and Safety

Last year, six Morgantown residents were poisoned by carbon monoxide (CO) from a pool heater. Every year there are over 20,000 carbon monoxide related emergency room visits and over 400 deaths. The symptoms of CO poisoning are vague – dizziness, nausea, headache, fatigue, confusion... These symptoms are caused by a lack of oxygen to the body that occurs when CO binds onto the victim's red blood cells, preventing them from transporting oxygen.

During cold weather more people are at risk from faulty furnaces, unvented heaters, and other indoor sources. Listed below are things you can do to protect yourself and to lower your risk of poisoning:

- Have a qualified technician inspect your heater, fire place, water heater, etc., and make sure they are properly vented.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector in your home. CO detectors are available at hardware stores, usually for under \$30. If the alarm goes off, leave your home and call 911.
- If you suspect CO poisoning and feel dizzy, light headed, or nauseous seek medical attention.
- Use generators, gas grills, camp stoves, or charcoal outside your home or garage, away from windows.
- Never heat your home with the oven.
- Move the car outside the garage as soon as it's turned on. Do not run a vehicle inside the garage Have a qualified technician inspect your heater, fire place, water heater, etc., and make sure they are properly vented.

A few small precautions can prevent a tragedy. Be safe.

-Nancy Key, Environmental Health and Safety Specialist

Industrial Hygiene is the science of anticipating, recognizing, and controlling hazards to improve health and well-being. The WVU Environmental Health and Safety employs a number of Industrial Hygiene Specialists, as well as General Safety, Fire Safety, Public Health, and Hazardous Waste Specialists. If you have a question about work or your environment, please contact Nancy at EHScontact@mail.wvu.edu or check out our web page: ehs.wvu.edu.