

# From the Firehouse

By Chief Bill Reed

With the home heating season upon us, this issue will concentrate on Carbon Monoxide, "The Silent Killer." Carbon Monoxide, chemical formula CO is often confused with Carbon Dioxide CO<sub>2</sub>. Carbon Monoxide is a by-product of combustion. It is found as a result of fumes from cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns and wood, charcoal, fuel oil, and natural gas heating systems. CO is colorless, and odorless and can cause sudden illness and death. One of the dangerous properties of CO is its ability to be picked up by red blood cell, even more easily than oxygen thus CO replaces oxygen in the blood, damaging tissue and eventually resulting in death. There is a blood test known as a carboxyhemoglobin level to detect CO exposure by potential victims. Symptoms of CO exposure include shortness of breath, mild nausea and mild headaches for low-level exposures. Moderate levels of exposure can result in severe headaches, dizziness, mental confusion, nausea and faintness. If exposure continues unconsciousness and death are eminent.

Preventative measures include the proper ventilation of home heating devices including the repair of holes, cracks in mortar joints and damaged flue liners in masonry chimneys. If we advise you to take a chimney or vent system out of service it is for the protection of you and your family. Do not grill with charcoal indoors, do not run internal combustion (gasoline engines) indoors, do not heat your home with the gas oven open. Do not run vehicles in enclosed garages with doors closed or even outdoors near windows and doors for prolonged periods. Keep an eye out for unusual condensation on the walls, as this is an indication of incomplete combustion and the probable presence of CO. Have your home heating systems checked annually, especially right before the winter heating period. Get carbon monoxide detectors. We recommend electric with battery back up and digital readout that sell for about \$30 to \$45. We cannot recommend a particular brand. Check consumer guide magazines or on-line information. For some of our residents that do not have electricity, at least have battery-powered detectors, we sometimes have these available at the FD. Carbon Monoxide detectors alarm for two reasons, elevated levels of CO or a defective detector. CO Detectors detect CO not natural gas, propane or smoke. Having a CO detector does not necessarily protect you from smoke and fire. Do not hesitate to call us when a CO detector alarms. We have sophisticated metering equipment to determine CO levels or the possibility of a defective detector.

We generally respond with rescue on CO alarm activations. Please advise the Dispatcher of any signs or symptoms of illness for the medical personnel to be aware of and the fire and rescue personnel to protect themselves. Evacuate the residence and remove yourself and your family from the exposure hazard. Try to leave the ventilating of the home to the firefighters so they can get an accurate reading of the levels you were exposed to. I stress, do not be hesitant to call us. It is not an inconvenience, and hesitation can be fatal. Each year 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning, 20,000 visit the emergency room and more than 4,000 are hospitalized. We value you as our friends, neighbors and family, so play it safe, and when in doubt-call us out. We still have CO detectors available through our FEMA grant for Middlefield and Huntsburg residents.

We are pleased to serve you. Stay safe.