

JACKSON, Mich., Oct. 20, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- As leaves fall and colder weather signals the start-up of furnaces across Michigan, Consumers Energy urges residents to protect themselves against carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. The toxic gas is colorless, odorless and tasteless, and can be produced when home appliances aren't operating or venting properly.

Gov. Rick Snyder has declared Oct. 20 through Oct. 26 "Carbon Monoxide Safety and Awareness Week" in Michigan. The governor's declaration reminds residents to take preventive measures and learn to recognize the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

"Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of poisoning deaths in the United States. Most poisonings occur between November and February when homes and businesses are being heated by various fuel sources," said

Michele Kirkland

, vice president of energy operations for Consumers Energy. "Our promise to our customers and

Michigan

residents is to help them stay safe by providing important information about carbon monoxide poisoning so they can protect themselves and their families from this invisible killer," she said.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by the incomplete combustion of fuels including oil, propane, natural gas, coal, wood, kerosene, gasoline, diesel fuel and charcoal. Deadly amounts of carbon monoxide can be produced by defective or poorly vented appliances that use these fuels such as furnaces, fireplaces and wood stoves, as well as water heaters, generators and vehicles. The Michigan Department of Community Health reported that in 2011 (latest available data) there were 934 unintentional CO poisonings in Michigan, 22 of which resulted in death.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning often mimic the flu, and include headaches, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath, and stinging or burning of the eyes. Prolonged exposure can cause disorientation, convulsions, unconsciousness and ultimately death.

The best defense against carbon monoxide problems is to install an audible carbon monoxide detector that meets or exceeds Underwriters Laboratory standards and will sound if dangerous levels of carbon monoxide are present in a home or building. "There's no doubt that audible alarm CO detectors save lives, and they are as important to have in residences and other buildings as smoke detectors," Kirkland noted.

Another way to protect against carbon monoxide poisoning is to make sure all fuel-burning appliances are properly installed and maintained. Furnaces should be cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified technician. Finally, venting on furnaces, water heaters and chimneys should be inspected periodically to be sure that animal nests or other debris do not interfere with proper ventilation.

If you suspect there is a carbon monoxide leak in your home, you should evacuate all people and pets, move to fresh air, and call 911.

Consumers Energy, Michigan's largest utility is the principal subsidiary of CMS Energy (NYSE: [CMS](#)), providing natural gas and electricity to 6.6 million of the state's 10 million residents in all 68 Lower Peninsula counties.

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CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) FACTS

- Carbon monoxide (CO) is known as the silent killer because it is invisible -- odorless, colorless and tasteless.
- CO is a toxic gas produced by the incomplete burning of fuels including oil, propane, coal, wood, natural gas, gasoline, diesel fuel, charcoal and kerosene. Faulty or inadequately vented appliances that use these fuels -- such as furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves, charcoal grills, kerosene heaters as well as gasoline-powered generators and vehicles -- can produce deadly amounts of CO.
- Symptoms of CO often mimic the "flu" and include headaches, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, shortness of breath and stinging or burning of the eyes. Prolonged exposure can cause disorientation, convulsions, unconsciousness (coma) and eventually death.

- Infants, the elderly, people with respiratory problems and pets are especially susceptible to CO poisoning. When CO is breathed into the body, carbon monoxide combines with the blood and prevents it from absorbing oxygen.
- Some warning signs of CO can include stale/stuffy air, excessive moisture on windows and walls and soot buildup around appliance vents.

HOW TO PREVENT CO POISONING

- Make sure fuel-burning appliances are properly installed and have them maintained regularly. Consumers Energy recommends that furnaces be cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified service person. Visually inspect chimneys on an annual basis as well.
 - Keep flues and chimneys clean and free of debris.
 - Repair rusted or pitted flue pipes leading from your furnace and water heater to the chimney.
- Keep the furnace air intake clear and unobstructed. If your furnace is housed in a small room, make sure it gets adequate fresh air by installing louvered doors or ventilating grills.
- Never use a gas range or unvented space heater (propane, gas, oil or kerosene) to heat your home.
- Never operate a generator in the home, garage, basement or any other enclosed area.
- Start lawn mowers and snow blowers outside, not inside the garage.
- Never run your vehicle in the garage, even with the garage door open.
- Never use a barbecue grill inside your home, on an enclosed porch or in your garage.
- Install an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) approved CO detector with a powerful audible alarm. The best models plug into a standard electrical outlet and have important features such as a rechargeable battery backup (in case of a power outage), a digital display of the amount of CO currently present, and an end of life feature that alerts the customer when it should be replaced.

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