

Don't neglect your furnace (or it might neglect you)! (205 words)

(NC)—Along with its effect on the colour of leaves, the autumn season in Canada brings those first cool nights that trigger the urge to switch on the old furnace or boiler, rousing it from months of dormancy. This is also the time of year homeowners should be thinking about having their home heating equipment cleaned and checked. Be sure your furnace is ready to battle the icy grip of winter by arranging a maintenance visit from your local heating contractor.

There are a number of components in your heating system that require regular inspection, including the heat exchanger, ignition system, fan, motor, bearings, belts, pumps, controls, exhaust, burners, pilot, thermostat, chimney and more. A properly licensed contractor will be able to identify problem areas and will recommend solutions that will ensure your year-round comfort. In the meantime, be sure to regularly replace the air filter on your forced air furnace and keep areas around hot air registers, return air grills or radiators free from obstructions.

For information on where to find a qualified contractor in your area, check out the website of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors of Canada at www.hrac.ca, or call 1-877-411-4722.

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HOME & GARDEN

Reducing heating costs in your home

(532 words)

(NC)—With the onset of the fall season, colder temperatures and snow will soon be here. In light of increasing fuel prices, that first large heating bill may come as a shock!

If your home has a furnace with a standing pilot, you may want to look at replacing it with a model that could substantially reduce fuel costs and improve the comfort levels in the home at the same time. Furnaces with standing pilots are typically efficient to between 50% and 60%. That means that for every dollar spent on fuel, 40 to 50 cents goes up the chimney in wasted energy. That can add up to a lot of money over the course of a heating season. Homeowners with furnaces in the 15-20 year range may also want to consider upgrading to a more efficient model.

Today's minimum standard for furnace manufacturers is 80% (known as "mid efficiency" models). In contrast, some high efficiency units are efficient to over 95% (so that less than five cents of every dollar spent on fuel is wasted.) The cost of upgrading an old system often can be returned in fuel savings within a few years. In addition, some furnaces contain energy saving variable speed ("ECM") blower motors that operate more quietly, distribute heat more gently, and use substantially less electricity than a standard motor. These systems can provide excellent additional savings, especially when the home has an air purifying or central air conditioning system. A heating professional will be able to advise you as to which furnace model is best suited to your needs.

Another way to achieve savings is through the use of a programmable thermostat. These control systems can be programmed to adjust (lower) the temperature of the home during sleep times or when the home is unoccupied and return (raise) it to more comfortable levels when the home is occupied. Depending on the set-back temperatures and times, it is possible to achieve up to a six percent savings over a non-programmable thermostat.

Poorly maintained equipment and/or dirty furnace filters can impede air flow through the furnace and duct work, resulting in higher fuel costs. Ensuring that the furnace and filter are clean will save you money on your energy bill while also prolonging the life of the equipment.

Draft-proofing will also save you money. Homeowners often compensate for small drafts in isolated areas by raising the temperature on the thermostat. Installation of weather striping around doors and windows will prevent drafts from entering the home. Checking and sealing small openings, and using lined or insulated drapes will help to reduce fuel consumption as well. Eliminating drafts will not only save on energy but will make the home more comfortable overall.

Having a properly operating humidifier can help to save on fuel costs, while adding to the comfort of your home. Typically, warm moist air feels warmer than just warm air. Being able to lower the thermostat even one degree with higher humidity levels can result in fuel savings.

Incorporating these small steps as winter approaches may help you save money in 2009. To find a qualified heating contractor visit www.hrac.ca or call toll free at 1-877-411-HRAC (4722).

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What you need to know about carbon monoxide

(503 words)

(NC)—Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that you cannot see, smell or taste. It is often referred to as the "silent killer". CO is produced by the incomplete burning of fuels such as natural gas, propane, heating oil, kerosene, coal, charcoal or wood.

Improperly installed or poorly maintained appliances that run on these fuels may create unsafe levels of CO. In enclosed spaces such as your home, cottage or recreational vehicle, even a small amount of CO is dangerous.

Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, burning eyes, confusion, drowsiness and even loss of consciousness. In very severe cases, CO poisoning can cause brain damage and death. The elderly, children, people with heart or respiratory conditions, and pets may be particularly sensitive to CO and may feel the effects sooner.

The conditions that can create a CO hazard include:

- Fuel-burning appliances, venting systems and chimneys that have not been serviced and maintained regularly by a qualified service technician or heating contractor.
- A chimney blocked by a bird or squirrel's nest, snow and ice or other debris.
- Improper venting of a furnace and cracked furnace heat exchangers.
- Exhaust fumes seeping into your home from a car running in an attached garage.
- Using fuel-burning appliances designed for outdoor use (barbecues, lanterns, chainsaws, lawnmowers, snowblowers) in a closed area (tent, recreational vehicle, cottage, workshop, garage).
- Combustion gases spilling into a home if too much air is being consumed by a fireplace or exhausted by kitchen/bathroom fans in a tightly-sealed home.

At any time, if you or any one else in your home is experiencing the symptoms of CO, make sure that everyone leaves the home immediately and gets medical help. Call 911 or your local fire department. If a CO detector alarm sounds in your home, open all doors and windows to ventilate. If you can't find the problem and the alarm continues, contact your local gas utility or a qualified heating contractor to check your fuel-burning equipment.

Remember that carbon monoxide detectors are a good second line of defence, but they do not eliminate the need for regular inspection, maintenance and safe use of your fuel-burning appliances. For information on where to find a qualified contractor in your area, check out the website of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Contractors of Canada at www.hrac.ca, or call 1-877-411-4722

Be aware of these Danger Signs!

- You or other members of your family are experiencing the symptoms of CO exposure.
- You notice a sharp, penetrating odour or smell of gas when your furnace or other fuel-burning appliance turns on.
- The air feels stale or stuffy.
- The pilot light of your gas furnace or other fuel-burning appliance goes out.
- Chalky, white powder forms on the chimney/exhaust vent pipe or soot builds up around the exhaust vent.
- Excessive moisture forms on windows and walls.
- The alarm of a carbon monoxide detector sounds.

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