combustion. If several appliances run at the same time in a well-insulated home, they “compete” for the available fresh air. If the fresh air supply gets low, appliances re-circulate each other’s exhaust instead of venting CO outside.

*Negative indoor air pressure*- When exhaust fans run, they lower the indoor air pressure. If the indoor air pressure gets lower than the outdoor air pressure the airflow in chimneys and vents can reverse, pulling exhaust containing CO back into the home.

*Loose vent pipes*- Vibrations can shake vent pipes loose from gas dryers, furnaces, or water heaters, preventing CO from being vented outside properly.

**Early warning is important!** The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends that every home have at least one carbon monoxide alarm with an audible warning signal installed near the sleeping area.

**How can I protect against carbon monoxide poisoning?**

Have your appliances checked regularly!

Have a qualified appliance technician check all fuel burning appliances, furnaces, venting and chimney systems at least once a year, or as recommended by the manufacturer.

**How does a carbon monoxide alarm work?**

It is not like a smoke alarm. A carbon monoxide alarm triggers an alarm based on exposure to CO over time. It is designed to sound an alarm before an average, healthy adult would experience symptoms.

**What do I do if my carbon monoxide alarm goes off?**

*Never ignore your alarm!* It is very possible that you will not be experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning when the alarm sounds. That does not mean there is no carbon monoxide present. The alarm is supposed to go off before you feel sick, so you have time to react and take action.

*Do not panic.* Press the Test/Silence button to temporarily quiet the alarm, then call 911 or the Fire Department. Immediately move everyone to a source of fresh air. Do not re-enter your home until the emergency responder has arrived, your home is aired out and your CO alarm returns to normal operation. Have the problem corrected as soon as possible. Keep your home well ventilated until the problem has been fixed.

**Important numbers:**

Falmouth Building Department 508-495-7470
Fire Prevention/Fire Alarm 508-495-2530
Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless gas. It is a common by-product of incomplete combustion, produced when fossil fuels (like oil, gas, or coal) burn. Because you can’t see, taste or smell it, carbon monoxide can kill you before you know it is there.

Exposure to lower levels over time can make you sick.

Why is Carbon Monoxide so dangerous?

Carbon monoxide robs you of what you need most—oxygen, which is carried to your cells and tissue by the hemoglobin in your blood. If you inhale even small amounts of CO, it quickly bonds with hemoglobin and displaces oxygen. This produces a toxic compound in your blood called carboxyhemoglobin (COHb). Carboxyhemoglobin produces flu-like symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, nausea, dizzy spells, confusion and irritability. Since symptoms are similar to the flu, carbon monoxide poisoning can be misdiagnosed. As levels of COHb rise, victims suffer vomiting, loss of consciousness, and eventually brain damage or death.

CO can be produced by gas or oil appliances like a furnace, clothes dryer, range, oven, water heater, or space heater. When appliances and vents work properly, and there is enough fresh air in your home to allow complete combustion, the trace amounts of CO produced are typically not dangerous. And normally, CO is safely vented outside your home.

Problems arise when something goes wrong. An appliance can malfunction; a furnace heat exchanger can crack; vents can clog, or debris may block a chimney or flue. Fireplaces, wood burning stoves, charcoal grills, or gas logs can produce unsafe levels of CO if they are un-vented or not properly vented. Exhaust can seep into the home from vehicles left running in an attached garage. All these sources can contribute to a CO problem in a home.

Where does Carbon Monoxide come from?

In some cases, problems arise even if appliances are working properly. The following conditions are dangerous because they can trap exhaust in your home, and are hard to recreate during a CO investigation:

*Incomplete combustion—Fuel-burning appliances need fresh air for complete