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Carbon Monoxide, the Silent Killer

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – An unfortunate incident that took the life of 50-year old Kirk Kousal, of Willow, on January 29th was a grim reminder of how important it is to have a working Carbon Monoxide alarm in your home.

Carbon Monoxide is an odorless, tasteless, invisible poison gas. It is produced when carbon-containing materials, like wood, coal, oil, and natural gas, burn incompletely. This occurs when a fire has a low oxygen supply.

Early signs of Carbon Monoxide exposure are headache, sleepiness, nausea and dizziness. Unfortunately these symptoms are identical to flu symptoms. Carbon Monoxide exposure is accumulative and will get worse the longer you stay in the contaminated atmosphere. It is important to get to fresh air and have your home checked for Carbon Monoxide.

Common sources of Carbon Monoxide are:

- Fuel-fired furnaces
- Gas water heaters, stoves and dryers
- Gas-powered generators
- Fireplaces, woodstoves and charcoal grills
- Lawnmowers and snowblowers
- Cars, trucks, ATV's, snowmobiles and motorcycles

These machines can produce Carbon Monoxide if they do not have enough fresh air flowing around them. If Carbon Monoxide builds up near you and your family, you can be poisoned, injured or killed.

The first line of defense against Carbon Monoxide poisoning is to have your gas, oil or wood burning appliances checked and serviced regularly by a professional. Secondly, install at least one Carbon Monoxide alarm near the bedrooms in your home. It is recommended to have at least one Carbon Monoxide alarm on every floor. By Alaska statute, all tenable structures that use a gas, oil, coal or wood-fired appliance must have an operating Carbon Monoxide alarm installed inside.

For more information regarding Carbon Monoxide contact Mahlon Greene, Public Education Coordinator for the Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety, at 907-746-5062.
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