



City of Madison Fire Department

News Release

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Back-to-Back CO Incidents Prompt Warnings, Reminders

Following two incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning that sent 10 people to the hospital over the last two days, the City of Madison Fire Department is reminding residents of the need for carbon monoxide alarms, particularly in structures where people will be sleeping.

Often called the “silent killer”, carbon monoxide is harmful when breathed because it displaces oxygen in the blood and deprives the heart, brain, and other vital organs of oxygen. Large amounts of CO can overcome people in minutes without warning—causing loss of consciousness and suffocation.

In this morning’s incident, City of Madison Fire Department paramedics transported five patients to local hospitals with carbon monoxide poisoning. The call came in just before 5 a.m. (4:47). The location at 2106 Sommers is a two-unit rental property.

Occupants awoke this morning feeling ill and called 911. Firefighters from Engine Company 3 were first on scene. They entered the residence with carbon monoxide monitors which sounded an alarm immediately upon entry.

Firefighters shut off gas to the residence and called MGE. Medic 5 transported a family of 3 from the upstairs unit to UW-Hospitals. Two patients from the downstairs apartment were taken to Meriter by Medic 8.

The cause of the carbon monoxide leak is believed to be a faulty furnace.

Yesterday, paramedics transported a total of five people to hospitals today after they were exposed to high levels of carbon monoxide during church services at Trinity United Methodist Church, 1123 Vilas Avenue.

The first indication that there was a problem came at 11:01 a.m. when paramedics were called to attend to a 2-year-old child who was reported to be groggy and lethargic. The parents of the child decided to transport the child to the hospital on their own.

At 12:37 p.m. a second call came in from the church reporting several people that were feeling ill. Engine Company 4 responded, bringing along monitors to check air quality at the church.

The alarms on the monitors sounded as soon as crews stepped inside the door.

CO readings showed more than 3,000 parts per million (ppm), more than 100 times the amount at which CO concentrations are determined to be unsafe.

Five patients were transported. Medic 1 transported one patient to UW Hospitals. Four other patients were transported to nearby St. Mary’s Hospital.

The Department’s Hazardous Incident Team was called to the scene to manage the air quality. Crews ventilated the building with positive pressure fans for an hour and a half to clear the building of the lingering concentrations of CO.

MGE representatives were at the scene to turn off gas to the building.

CO is the leading cause of accidental poisoning in the U.S., killing 500 people each year and sending more than 15,000 people to emergency rooms. It is a by-product of incomplete combustion that can be produced by stoves, water heaters, fireplaces, cars, gas grills and a number of other appliances used in homes. Children and the elderly are most susceptible.

The City of Madison Fire Department reminds residents:

- ✓ **DO** have your fuel-burning appliances -- including oil and gas furnaces, gas water heaters, gas ranges and ovens, gas dryers, gas or kerosene space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves -- inspected by a trained professional at the beginning of every heating season. Make certain that the flues and chimneys are connected, in good condition, and not blocked.
- ✗ **DON’T** idle the car in a garage -- even if the garage door to the outside is open. Fumes can build up very quickly in the garage and living area of your home.
- ✗ **DON’T** use a gas oven to heat your home, even for a short time.
- ✗ **DON’T** *ever* use a charcoal grill indoors -- even in a fireplace.
- ✗ **DON’T** use any gasoline-powered engines (mowers, weed trimmers, snow blowers, chain saws, small engines or generators) in enclosed spaces.
- ✗ **DON’T** ignore symptoms, particularly if more than one person is feeling them. You could lose consciousness and die if you do nothing.

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