

## Propane Propriety

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Propane propriety. Say that five times fast. Almost impossible to do so, but propane fuel and appliances are not impossible to maintain in a secure manner. Though it is one of the safest energy sources available, it is well known that propane is flammable and may cause fires and explosions if a leak occurs. In the past month, Peterborough Fire and Rescue have responded to two, highly volatile incidents with regards to propane leaks in large residential complex areas that fortunately, did not result in unwanted structural reconfigurations.

It's easy to confuse the odor of gas with the smell of a dead mouse, rotten eggs, garbage or sewage. This, in fact occurred at Long Hill Estates in Peterborough. A resident thought that she had an expired mouse in her wall; never realizing the odor was a potentially explosive gas leak from her exterior storage tank. Peterborough Fire & Rescue has specialized tools for sniffing out dangerous gas levels. Amongst them are a jointly donated thermal imager from the Lion's Club and the Goyette Fund. The thermal imager allows firefighters to "see" temperature differentials of clouds of explosive vapor.

If you suspect a propane gas leak, follow these emergency steps: put out smoking materials and other open flames. Check gas appliances to ascertain if they are on but not burning. If so, turn them off. Open windows and doors to provide fresh air. DO NOT operate light switches, light matches or use your home phone. A spark or a flame may ignite the gas. Close all gas tank or cylinder supply valves. Evacuate your building and alert your neighbors to the danger. Call your local fire department at a neighbor's house or by cell phone outside of the gas leak range.

Cooking odors as well as cigarette smoke, incense and scented candles can mask the smell of gas. And how about all of us with head colds and sinus infections? Especially in these conditions, a gas leak may be undetectable by smell. I strongly recommend anyone with gas appliances to install propane gas detectors in accordance to manufacturer instructions on every level of your home.

Propane gas detectors determine gas leaks but are not to be confused with carbon monoxide (CO) detectors. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, poisonous gas, a by-product of incomplete combustion due to malfunctioning appliances that are fueled by LP gas, oil, wood or coal. These appliances include furnaces, stoves, ovens and water heaters. Symptoms of CO poisoning may include nausea, fatigue, headaches, dizziness, confusion and breathing difficulty. Because CO poisoning causes a victim's blood pressure to rise; the victim's skin may take on a pink or red cast. I know, I know. How can one tell the difference between everyday flu symptoms from potentially fatal CO poisoning? Only by purchasing UL listed CO detectors and installing them outside of sleeping areas and near fuel-burning appliances. The detectors will alert you of CO exposure. If the alarm goes off, follow the same emergency procedures mentioned above for propane gas leaks.

If you believe you have symptoms of CO poisoning, see medical attention immediately. Infants and the elderly may not be able to voice their symptoms, so be especially careful to have them examined if they have been exposed.

Have I filled up all of your sockets with my suggestions? Truly, not necessary. Just call Peterborough Fire & Rescue at 924-8090 for recommendations as to where your home can best utilize propane or CO detectors. I'd be happy to repeat that advice five times fast.

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