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CO Facts

Some things I have learned really stick in my head. Some are hard to believe but can't be refuted so they stick like glue. I may write about carbon monoxide (CO) too often but it is probably the most dangerous element that is produced inside a home and the most misunderstood. It is possible for an oil heating system to produce CO but when an oil system is so far out of adjustment as to produce CO, it will also emit some bad odor and usually enough smoke to get the occupants attention. There was one oil system produced in the 1970s that was dangerous and it was quickly recalled and modified to be safe. Since then I have done thousands of combustion tests and never measured a dangerous level of CO in an oil system. Natural gas and propane systems are com-

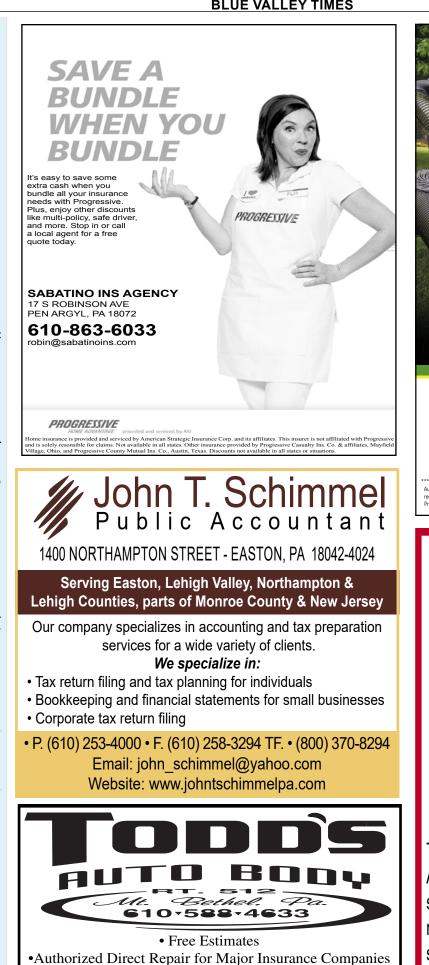
pletely different in the way they produce CO and the levels that they can create. A low level like 20ppm (parts per million) for several hours can cause mild symptoms like headache and a feeling of malaise. Lack of oxygen for combustion is one of the things that produces

CO and since it is heavier than air it hugs the floor. When a chimney fails to draw the byproducts of combustion out of the home, it will stay in the basement. It will fill the room like water fills a bathtub. Eventually the CO is drawn into the appliance and used for combustion because oxygen has been displaced. That creates an exponentially larger amount of CO and before long the level can be 400 or more ppm. That level will cause death in minutes. The insidious thing

about it is that it has no color or odor. If you start feeling sick, you will probably stay home. If you are sick because CO is filling your home, you will never get better and may get a lot worse. It clouds the mind and makes critical thinking

the minu and makes critical thinking nearly impossible. In a home with an attached garage, it can find its way into the house if the car is run in the garage for more than a minute. Every house is different but some homes are much more susceptible to that problem than others. If you back your car into the garage and then drive out and close the door, there will be a substantial amount of CO still in the garage. Lawn mowers and backup generators produce very high levels of CO and need to be used in well ventilated area. Common sense rules the day.

Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email Ken@FieldsService.com



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