

# Heating systems should be checked

Old faithful - the furnace Grandpa had installed sometime after the war ended - may not keep your family safe and warm this winter without some tender loving care, say experts at Ontario's Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

"Making sure your heating system is fully inspected every year is vital for home safety," says Bob Clendinning, director of the ministry's Fuels Safety Branch.

Grandpa's old coal-changed-to-oil-converted-to-gas model is an extreme example of a system that needs care. However, consumers should remember that the dangers of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning exist with any type of fuel-burning heating systems.

Natural gas or oil furnaces, propane heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces - none is immune to problems that can have life-threatening consequences if they aren't cared for properly.

Furnaces fueled by oil or natural gas generate the heat that keeps most Ontario homes warm on cold winter nights. Heat is produced by combining fuel with the oxygen in the air, then igniting it in a furnace's combustion chamber.

"Combustion always produce a small amount of carbon monoxide," explains Clendinning. "It's a colorless, odorless gas that causes headaches, nausea and even death if allowed to collect in the house."

Making sure the furnace is working properly - that enough air is available in the system to make the flame burn "cleanly" - lets the small amount of carbon monoxide produced to simply rise up and away through the chimney. However, if the air supply is not adequate increasing amounts of carbon monoxide will result. Combined with a partially blocked chimney, the results could be disaster.

"I can't encourage people enough to help protect their families by ensuring their heating system is in good order. Have it checked out by a qualified contractor, who is registered with the Fuels Safety Branch," says Clendinning.

Because lives are at stake, it is especially important for do-it-yourselfers to recognize their limitations. Unqualified persons should never tamper with a

heating system.

The branch also advises householders concerned about the safety of their systems to deal only with reputable heating contractors. "Ask your friends or fuel supplier for the name of a good contractor," Clendinning says. "Avoid fly-by-night operators who may arrive at the door offering 'special deals'."

When repairs are required find out if the costs are covered by a warranty or maintenance plan. If not, the branch advises consumers to get three written estimates before signing on the dotted line. These should outline the work to be done and who will do it, as well as starting and completion dates.

In addition to having a yearly inspection of the furnaces and chimney made, householders can help make sure their heating system continues to keep the chill out.

"If you have a forced-air system, change furnace filters at least twice a heating season."

"Make sure warm-air outlets and cold-air returns aren't covered by carpets or blocked by furniture or debris."

"Examine all systems from time to time for signs of corrosion, leakage or water stains."

"Keep bleaches, paints, paint strippers, varnishes and water softeners away from your furnace."

"Make sure the heating system's air supply isn't blocked by walls or any other obstructions when you renovate."

"Keep the area around the furnace free from dust, lint, rags, paint, drain cleaners and any other materials or chemicals that could catch fire or explode if they become too hot."

Consumers interested in learning more about home heating safety can reserve a copy of a new ministry brochure by that title. To receive a free copy or information about contracts, home renovations and many other consumer issues, contact MCCR's Consumer Information Centre at 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2H6. Tel. (416)326-8555 or toll free 1-800-268-1142. Ontario residents with an (807) area code may call the (416) line collect. The TDD line for the hearing impaired is (416)326-8566.



## Carolfest 1990

On Monday evening, Carolfest 1990 took place at St. John's United Church, on Guelph St. in Georgetown. Various church choirs from the community took part under the musical direction of Haydn C. Evans. A col-

lection was held with proceeds going to the Georgetown Food Bank. (Herald photo by Garry Murdock)

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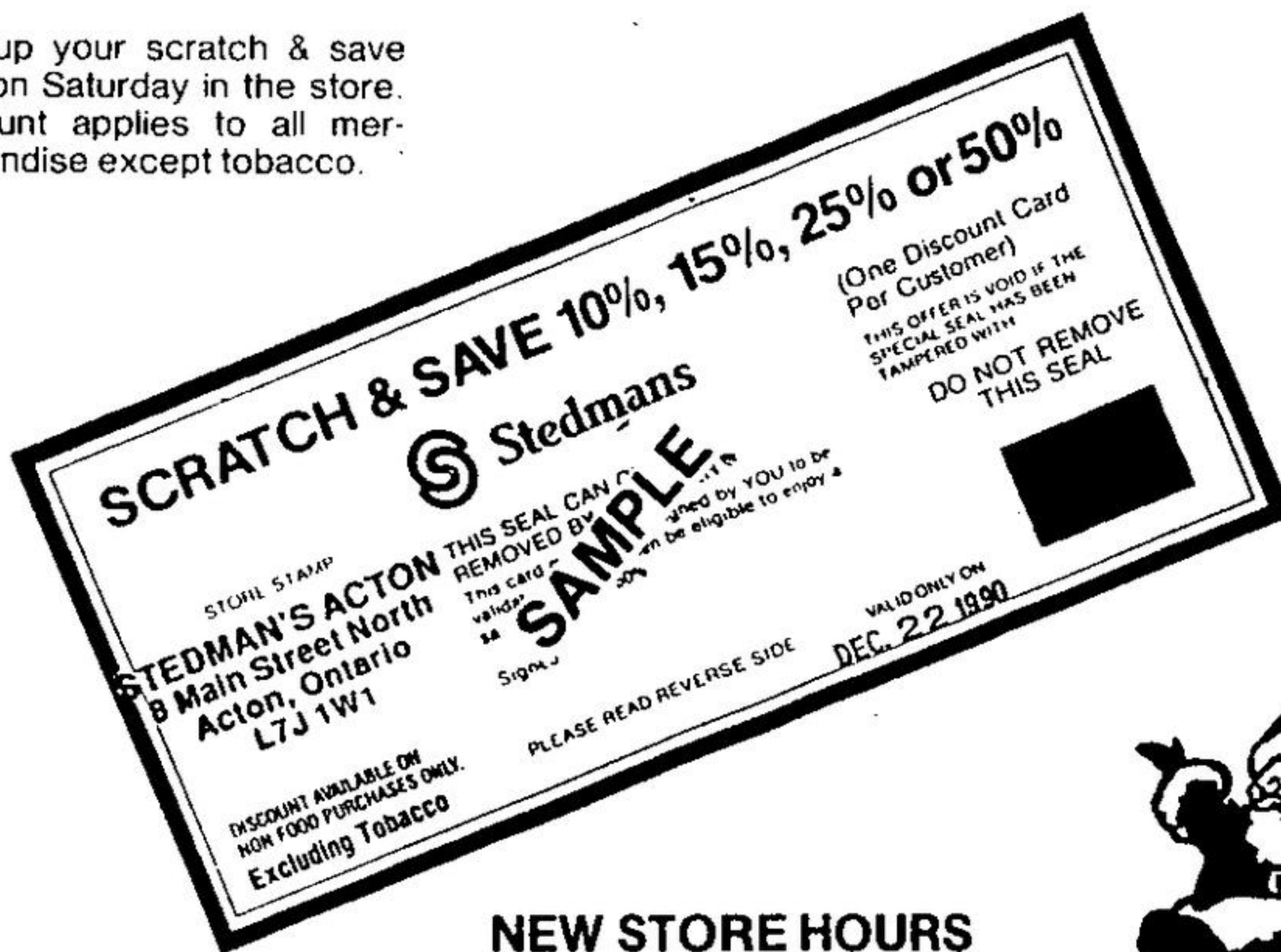
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