

It's better safe than sorry with your carbon monoxide alarm

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Over the past month, the Milton Fire Department has responded to almost two dozen carbon monoxide alarms, with many seemingly caused by faulty detectors.

While that might seem like a waste of time and resources, spokespeople from the Milton Fire Department said they couldn't see it more differently. In fact, training co-ordinator Tim Roberts said he wouldn't mind if there were even more calls.

"It means the system is working," Mr. Roberts said, explaining that Milton residents should be calling the fire department every time their carbon monoxide detectors go off. "That's one call we don't mind going to."

He said it's not a question of wasted resources. But it might be a question of wasted lives if the calls don't come in.

"People sometimes ignore it and treat it (the alarm) as a nuisance, waiting for the situation to worsen," he said.

But, he said, waiting until the morning to see if the situation has taken care of itself could prove fatal, since carbon monoxide is colourless and odourless.

From November 15 to December 15 — according to incident summaries sent to The Champion from the Milton Fire Department — fire

crews responded to 22 carbon monoxide alarm activations in Milton.

Of those, faulty detectors were suspected in 16 cases. Three incidents were caused by what fire crews suspect were faulty furnaces and one was caused by a gas stove. Two alarms went off because vehicles were left running in residents' garages.

Capt. Mark Cross, who recently finished a carbon monoxide training program for firefighters, said he still responds to calls where people tell him they ignored the first couple of alarms and called the fire department only when the alarm went off a third or fourth time. This needs to change, he said.

It's normal that more carbon monoxide calls come through in the winter months, Capt. Cross said. It's particularly important at this time of year for the public to be aware of how this deadly gas enters homes in order to prevent tragedies.

"It's called the silent killer for a reason," Capt. Cross said.

There are a few key reasons why carbon monoxide incidents increase in the winter, Capt. Cross said.

Since houses are kept buttoned up tightly during the winter, Capt. Cross said running appliances can cause a negative pressure in the air, which in turn results in the house

sucking in air from outside through any and every crevice. If the air is polluted or contains carbon monoxide from nearby running cars, fumes can enter the home.

Also, having dangerous fumes emit from a furnace isn't unusual when it's first fired up. And since windows are closed in winter, there's nowhere for the toxic fumes to go. Blocked chimneys can also cause problems.


"Get your chimney swept and inspected on a regular basis," he advised the public. "Get everything serviced on a regular basis. That's the best thing you can do."

Capt. Cross said people sometimes think it's okay to run their cars in their garages if the garage doors are open. It's not, he said, adding that a carbon monoxide detector can even go off because of an idling car in the neighbour's driveway.

"Thirty seconds is all you need to warm up your car. And let it run in the driveway (not the garage)," he said.

Put the detector where occupants sleep. There's no point of it being in the basement. When harmful fumes come from the furnace, the gas travels through the ductwork and often right into bedrooms where people are sleeping.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiesse@miltoncanadianchampion.com.




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Thank you one and all,
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