

Odorless Gas Kills Quickly

By K. H. SUTHERLAND, M.D.,
County Health Officer

Last winter a Los Angeles couple nearly died from carbon monoxide poisoning as a result of using a small charcoal burning barbecue grill inside their closed house trailer for warmth on a chilly night.

Every year a number of people die from the lethal emissions of unvented gas heaters burning in unventilated rooms. Even though unvented gas heaters are illegal here, last year in this area there were 24 deaths attributed to these heaters.

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Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas, lighter than air and invisible to the eye. It is an extremely dangerous threat to life because when it is breathed into the body it replaces oxygen in the blood, causing asphyxiation.

CARBON MONOXIDE can form any time materials containing carbon are burned. Carbon materials include gasoline, oil, wood, paper, natural gas, bottled gas, charcoal, coal and coke. Carbon monoxide may form regardless of where the burning takes place — in a stove, a gas refrigerator, furnace, fireplace, heater or engine. When there is insufficient air present for the fuel to burn completely — that is, when the

devices are not adjusted, vented or operated properly to provide this air — carbon monoxide is formed and given off.

Poisoning from carbon monoxide can happen very swiftly if concentrations of the gas in the air are sufficiently high. In such a case, it is possible for a person to lose all of the oxygen in his blood, through its replacement with carbon monoxide, within two to five minutes. Early symptoms include headache and dizziness, yawning, sleepiness and a ringing in the ears. Since brain cells have the highest demand of all body cells for oxygen, these cells start to die if oxygen is shut off for as little as two minutes. In cases of carbon monoxide poisoning, the

victim may experience mental confusion, inability to move and loss of consciousness. Death may follow soon if the blood oxygen is not replaced quickly.

A DRIVER of a car may be the victim of slow carbon monoxide poisoning if the car is completely closed and the exhaust system or muffler is defective. Also the air intake of some car heaters is placed in front of the car. When the car is parked, stopped or moving too close to the exhaust pipe of another car, a dangerous concentration of carbon monoxide can be built up in the second car when the heater is in operation, especially if the windows of the second car are closed.

However, in this area where winter weather is moderate, the most common source of carbon monoxide poisoning is

the unvented gas heater, and the most common occurrence is the home.

IF UNVENTED gas heaters cannot be replaced, the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning can be eliminated by following these three rules: 1) always leave one or more windows open to provide adequate ventilation while unvented heaters are in use; 2) don't sleep in a room while an unvented heater is in operation; 3) have heaters and other gas appliances inspected NOW by a qualified service agency or the gas company to assure their safe operation.

A pamphlet on other dangers of unvented gas heaters will be mailed to anyone sending a request to the Division of Public Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Department, 230 N. Broadway, L. A. 12.

Kermit Smith Gets Certificate

Kermit Smith, 205 Avenue H, Redondo Beach, has received his professional designation in contract administration from the University of California Extension.

Smith will receive his certificate during the University Extension award luncheon tomorrow at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Students Will Attend Meeting

Betty Lou Kautto and Joan Maddox will represent Marymount College at the Camp Hess Kramer Conference on Human Relations at Malibu on Nov. 13 to 15. The theme of the conference will be: "Equality: Realities and Illusions."

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