



## CenterPoint Energy Offers Winter Safety Information

MINNEAPOLIS, Jan 11, 2006 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX News Network/ -- Cold weather and falling snow should remind all Minnesotans to learn about natural gas safety. CenterPoint Energy (NYSE: CNP) is offering winter safety information for its customers and the public to help them stay safe this winter.

What to do if you smell natural gas: Natural gas is a colorless, odorless fossil fuel, so utilities add a chemical odorant called mercaptan to help detect a gas leak. If one smells gas, they should:

- \* Leave immediately. Do not use electric switches, a phone, or anything that could cause a spark. Do not return until given permission by the utility or public safety officials.
- \* Go to a safe location and call the CenterPoint Energy - Emergency Service/Gas Leak Hotline: (612) 372-5050 or 1-800-722-9326 or call 911
- \* Do not assume someone else has reported the leak.
- \* Leave all repairs to properly equipped and trained utility technicians. Never try to repair a natural gas leak.

Carbon monoxide poisoning: Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, and non-irritating poisonous gas. Symptoms of CO poisoning can resemble the common flu -- headaches, nausea, fatigue, confusion, and dizziness. These symptoms vary depending on a person's age and general health, level of physical activity, and the duration and concentration of the exposure. Any fuel-burning appliance, equipment or engine has the potential to produce CO. This is more likely to occur if the equipment is poorly maintained, improperly operated or adjusted, or if a home has insufficient ventilation," said Boettcher.

- \* Have all fuel-burning equipment and appliances inspected annually by a qualified professional, as recommended by manufacturers. The inspection helps to ensure safe operation, efficiency and dependability.
- \* Do not leave vehicles running in an attached garage. In as little as 45 seconds, a vehicle can produce a significant level of CO from exhaust that can gradually enter the home. This can occur even when the garage door is left open while a vehicle runs inside. Pull motor vehicles all the way out of the garage immediately after starting them and close the garage door.
- \* Install a CO detection device as an added layer of defense. Look for a quality device with an audible alarm and digital readout. Make sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and operation.
- \* Contact CenterPoint Energy for a free brochure, The Inside Story on Carbon Monoxide, with information on the causes and symptoms of CO and how to prevent it. The brochure is also available in Spanish. To request a brochure, call (800) 745-0711 or place your request through the company's web site at <http://www.CenterPointEnergy.com>.
- \* Never confine fuel-burning appliances in small, tightly sealed areas while in use. These appliances need plenty of fresh air for safe combustion and ventilation. Also keep the surrounding area free of debris and clutter, and keep flammable substances a safe distance away.
- \* Make sure fresh air intakes are not blocked or restricted. The intake brings fresh air to natural gas furnaces and water heaters for their combustion, and helps provide important fresh air exchange for your home.
- \* Be sure all fuel-burning appliances are properly vented and the vents are in good condition. Appliances need proper ventilation to ensure combustion gasses are removed from the home. Visually inspect the

vents for rust, holes or gaps. You may need a qualified professional to check the vents to ensure they are properly installed.

- \* Never use charcoal or gas grills inside the home or garage, even with doors or windows open. Also, charcoal grills should never be stored in the garage until the coals are completely out.
- \* Keep vents and chimneys clear of debris or other blockages. Never leave a fire smoldering in the fireplace.
- \* Don't try to heat a room with a gas range, oven or clothes dryer.
- \* Make sure all fuel-burning appliances show a clear blue flame. A yellow or orange flame may indicate a problem and should be checked by a qualified technician.
- \* Watch for signs that your home is not receiving enough fresh air for moisture control and proper appliance operation. They include: excessive humidity in the home indicated by heavy moisture or frost on the inside of windows; soot build-up on ceilings and walls, the front of a fireplace, or front panel of a furnace; or the presence of a peculiar, stale odor or burning eyes when an appliance is operating.

**Safe meter operation:** Snow and ice can develop on meters during thawing and freezing conditions. This situation usually occurs in early and late winter and can affect the operation of a meter's regulator vent, causing a service disruption or a build-up of natural gas. CenterPoint Energy recommends the following steps to prevent these problems:

- \* Keep the meter area and its pathway clear of snow, leaves, and other debris. Remove snow from the meter by hand. Do not use a snow blower near the meter.
- \* Do not attempt to remove ice from the meter.
- \* If you observe one or more of the following conditions, report it to CenterPoint Energy at (612) 321-5200 or 1-800-722-9326:
  - Snow or ice formations are visible above the meter.
  - The meter is located below a downspout.
  - The overhang or eaves do not fully extend over the meter.
  - The meter is located below a roof valley without a gutter.
  - The meter is located below an exterior water spigot.

**Unsafe flexible gas connectors:** WARNING! The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warns natural gas users that older brass, uncoated appliance connectors can crack or break, causing fires and explosions resulting in deaths and injuries. These connectors are corrugated metal tubes that connect a home's natural gas appliances to a fuel source. The connectors are no longer used for new installations, but if your natural gas appliances are 20 years old or older, you might have defective connectors. The connectors are usually found on gas ranges, ovens and clothes dryers, but they can also be found on water heaters and furnaces. If you suspect you have unsafe connectors, follow these steps:

- \* Do NOT move the appliance or disturb the connector. This could cause it to break which can result in a fire or explosion.
- \* Schedule a qualified plumber or heating dealer to inspect the connector. Do NOT try to do this yourself.
- \* If necessary, ask them to replace the connector with a new model certified by the American Gas Association. Newer models are made of stainless steel or plastic-coated metal.
- \* Any uncoated brass connector should be replaced immediately.

**Staying warm while you wait for appliance service:** Very cold weather can create heavy repair demand. Homeowners with heating problems can expect service delays, even though our technicians work overtime to meet this demand. Here are tips to keep warm while you wait for service:

- \* Turn on all electrical lights.
  - \* Fill bathtub with hot water.
  - \* Bake cookies. The heat from the oven and the activity will warm you and your home. Do not, however, just turn on the oven and open the door. An oven is not a space heater.
  - \* If the outside temperature is above 20 degrees F. build a fire in the fireplace. If it's colder than 20 degrees F, do not, because the fireplace will pull in cold air rather than create warm air.

- \* Use sweaters, blankets or an electric space heater. Do not use un-vented heaters such as kerosene heaters or lamps.
- \* Prevent water faucets from freezing by opening the doors under the kitchen sink and letting the faucets drip slowly.

Headquartered in Houston, TX, CenterPoint Energy is a domestic energy delivery company that includes electric transmission and distribution, natural gas distribution and sales, and interstate pipeline and gathering operations. The company serves nearly five million metered customers in six states and has assets of about \$16 billion. With more than 9,000 employees, CenterPoint Energy and its predecessor companies have been in business for over 135 years. In Minnesota, CenterPoint Energy is the state's largest natural gas distribution company, serving more than 760,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers in over 240 communities. Home Service Plus(R), the company's non-regulated business in Minnesota, offers products and services in the categories of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) and appliance repair, and HVAC and hearth equipment sales. Visit the Web site at <http://www.CenterPointEnergy.com> .

**SOURCE CenterPoint Energy**

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