



## CARBON MONOXIDE: A SILENT & INVISIBLE ENEMY

**Kuujuuaq, October 6, 2014** – The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) wishes to take advantage of Fire Prevention Week to remind all *Nunavimmiut* about the dangers of carbon monoxide and how to avoid poisoning. “This gas is one of the most dangerous as it is invisible, odourless and tasteless, does not irritate the eyes or the respiratory system, but can have severe consequences on your health,” stated Dr. Serge Déry, Director of Public Health at the NRBHSS.

### Causes

To prevent poisoning, it is important to identify equipment that emits carbon monoxide. Any motor vehicle, heating system or equipment that burns fuel such as gasoline, diesel, wood, propane, natural gas, kerosene or coal produces carbon monoxide. If such equipment is not well maintained and is used in a closed space, the risk of carbon-monoxide poisoning increases. It is particularly important for everyone to remember that any generator, small camping stove, wood-burning heating system, chainsaw, barbecue, four-wheeler, etc. are sources of carbon monoxide. “Many *Nunavimmiut* will work on their snowmobiles with the engine running, in closed spaces such as shacks, especially during the winter season. This is a prime example of a high-risk scenario for carbon-monoxide poisoning. People need to be careful and work on their machines outside or in a closed area that is properly ventilated,” explained Aileen MacKinnon, Chief of the Kativik Regional Police Force (KRPF) and Director of Public Security for the Kativik Regional Government (KRG).

### Symptoms

The symptoms of carbon-monoxide poisoning are nausea, headache, tiredness, dizziness and vomiting. It can lead to loss of consciousness and, in extreme cases, death. In carbon-monoxide poisoning, the gas enters the respiratory system and replaces oxygen in the blood; the result is that vital organs and tissues are unable to function properly. The consumption of alcohol multiplies the risk of death by carbon monoxide as it can make symptoms go undetected and slows our reaction time.

### How to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning?

- Ensure regular maintenance on equipment that runs on fuel and never use such equipment in a closed or poorly ventilated space.
- Never leave the engine of motor vehicles such as four-wheelers running in a shack, even with the door open.
- Be aware of the risk of carbon-monoxide poisoning if several persons show the same signs of sickness in a closed space such as a cabin.
- Always make sure your cabin’s chimney is not obstructed and is in good shape.
- Never use a barbecue inside your house or your cabin.
- Install a carbon-monoxide detector in places where there is a potential emanation of carbon monoxide.
- The only way to detect the presence of carbon monoxide is by using a detector specifically made for this. By the end of 2014, all NRBHSS dwellings will be equipped with such a detector. Further, all Kativik Municipal Housing Bureau

(KMHB) housing units are equipped with carbon-monoxide detectors and smoke detectors. Over the coming year, the KMHB will change its carbon-monoxide detectors and smoke detectors for improved models with a sealed lithium battery with a life expectancy of 10 years.

- Occupants should not tamper with or remove these detectors. If they think that they are not working properly or are oversensitive and go off too often, they should contact the owner of the building.
- It is also important to keep in mind that smoke detectors do not detect the presence of carbon monoxide.

*The NRBHSS is a public agency created in 1978 under the **James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement**. It is responsible for nearly the entire territory located north of the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel in terms of the provision of health and social services for the inhabitants of the 14 communities.*

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**Source:** Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

**For information:** Caroline D'Astous  
Communications Officer, NRBHSS  
819 964-2222, extension 293

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