

Stories from the Neighborhood

the heat that leaked

Franksaid he never really grasped the concept of heat loss until he spent time in the basement of his new home.

“That’s when we still had the old heating system,” Frank said. “When that boiler was on, it felt like 90° down there. Since we replaced the system, the basement is always nice and cool.”

understanding heat loss

Frank and Valerie’s 90° basement with their old boiler illustrates one of the defects of older heating systems: poor insulation. Instead of the system’s heat making its way from the boiler into the home, as much as 10% “leaked” into the basement because of “jacket loss.”

And that was only part of the problem. About 25% of the heat generated by Frank and Valerie’s old boiler was lost because the system cycled on and off so much. Heat was going up the flue and not warming the house.

“We’ve already noticed a big difference in our fuel bills. We’re definitely spending a lot less with our new boiler,” Frank said.

Valerie was surprised at how compact their new boiler turned out to be. “It’s probably about one-quarter the size of the old one, but it keeps our home more comfortable than before,” she said.

The Mendozas have much more room in the basement now. “Frank is putting in a workshop and I’m going to use one area for a home gym,” Valerie said. “That wouldn’t

have been possible if we had held on to the old heating system.” “Now,” added Valerie, “it’s time to do something about that kitchen.”

“Our home inspector told us the heating system in our new home would probably last another five years, but he told us not to wait until it broke down. The system was definitely past its prime. Plus, we read in your newsletter about how new systems burn a lot less fuel. This all convinced us that investing in a new system now was the smart thing to do.”

— Frank and Valerie Mendoza

“I really knew something was wrong when I opened the door to my basement. My cat walked out moving in slow motion, as if she were a toy whose batteries were wearing down.”

—Leslie Claire



“We’ve relocated many times because of our careers and that’s given us experience in judging the capabilities of heating fuel companies. We always ask a lot of questions

about their service and programs before we sign up. When we first started out, we only asked one question: *What’s your (fuel) price today?*”

— Anthony and Elaine Tedeschi

escape from an invisible danger

Leslie says she feels much safer because her new home is heated with oil. And that’s easy to understand, considering the close call she had in her previous home, which had a natural gas system.

“I woke up one morning feeling very disoriented,” she said. “I started walking around the house, but I couldn’t think straight.” Then she saw her cat, who appeared to be moving in slow motion. “That’s when I called my sister,” Leslie said. “She understood what was happening and told me to get out of the house right away and then call the fire department. They came in and shut my gas furnace down immediately.” Carbon monoxide gas had been backing up into Leslie’s house. “If I had waited a few more minutes, I wouldn’t be here telling this story,” she said.

recognizing symptoms

Mental confusion is one sign of carbon monoxide poisoning. Its other symptoms can mimic the flu. (Most cases of carbon monoxide poisoning occur during the flu season.)

To avoid an experience like Leslie’s, make sure all your fuel-burning appliances are inspected regularly. Leslie now pays careful attention to maintenance schedules.

Nevertheless, she also knows that oil heat systems pose an extraordinarily low risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. (It’s why she feels so secure in her new oil-heated home.) Even in the rare cases of a malfunctioning oil system leaking carbon monoxide, which is invisible and odorless, the homeowner gets a visible warning—smoke. Leslie’s natural gas system didn’t give her that warning.

SAFETY TIP

Carbon monoxide poisoning is not always caused by heating systems. Some cases are automotive related. That’s why you should NEVER let your car idle in a garage — even if the garage door is open. Fumes can build up rapidly and then seep into your home.



trust is a must

Anthony remembers when he accepted a low-price offer for heating oil from a company he didn’t know much about. He wasn’t aware of it at the time, but the company’s credit had been cut off, yet they were still offering heating oil at below-market rates.

“The company ended up declaring bankruptcy, but they never told their customers,” Anthony said. “They simply disappeared—right in the middle of winter. We had a heck of a time trying to find someone to deliver more fuel to us before our tank dried up.”

It was a hard lesson, but it taught him that when choosing a fuel dealer, some things are more important than price. “You need to work a bit to find a heating fuel company you can trust,” he said.



SAFETY TIP

Cut heating costs even more by installing insulation in your attic, under floors and in walls. (It will make your home quieter too.) To find out how much insulation your home needs, check out the Zip Code Insulation Program website of the U.S. Department of Energy at www.ornl.gov/~roofs/Zip/ZipHome.html. Find other tips on saving energy at www.energytips.oilheatpros.com.