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Natural Gas

Article type:

poison information

Access:

public



Natural Gas: Used for heating homes and running appliances such as water heaters and stoves. It contains methane (also known as swamp gas or marsh gas), which is a hydrocarbon. Methane occurs naturally in the earth's crust and is also formed by decaying organic matter such as manure or sewage. Natural gas has no odour; mercaptans (which smell like rotten eggs) are added in low concentrations so that leaks can be detected. Natural gas is highly flammable and will spontaneously combust if there is a source of ignition. Natural gas becomes a liquid at - 120 degrees Celsius and is called LNG (liquefied natural gas).

Is it toxic?: Considered a simple asphyxiant, which means it displaces oxygen from the air. If there is a leak into a small-enclosed space the resulting lack of oxygen may cause symptoms

of hypoxia. Incomplete combustion of natural gas (from a malfunctioning furnace) can produce carbon monoxide.

Health Effects:

Skin: Exposure to compressed or liquid forms can result in frostbite. Symptoms include a pale or blanched appearance to skin, numbness and blisters.

Inhalation: A natural gas leak in an outdoor environment is usually not concentrated enough to cause symptoms. A leak into a small-enclosed space can result in a lack of oxygen in the air and symptoms of hypoxia. These include headache, decreased vision, fatigue, shortness of breath and loss of consciousness.

What to do:

If you smell gas or hear the flow of escaping gas, follow these steps immediately:

- Do not smoke, light matches, operate electrical switches, or use cellphones or telephones. Do not create any other source of ignition.
- Leave the building immediately; leave the door open and any windows that may already be open.
- Turn your gas off at the meter, if you know how.
- Get to a nearby phone and call the gas company (in British Columbia contact Terasen Gas 24-hour Emergency Line at 1-800-663-9911) or the fire department.

Skin: If skin is exposed to compressed or liquid natural gas, wash skin with soap and water. Rinse thoroughly. If skin is blistered, appears pale, blanched or is numb contact the Poison Control Centre.

Inhalation: Get away from area and breathe fresh air. If anyone is experiencing shortness of breath or a decreased level of consciousness call an ambulance immediately. Otherwise contact the Poison Control Centre.

How can I prevent exposure? Do regular maintenance on gas pipes, appliances and furnace. Know how to turn off the gas in your home. Have emergency phone numbers at hand in case they are needed.

Need more information: Call the Poison Control Centre.

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Keywords:

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Source URL (retrieved on 2025-09-05 14:08): <http://www.dpic.org/faq/natural-gas>