

February 2009

RM News & Notes

Reminder...

Carbon Monoxide

You can't see it, smell it or taste it

Check the flame color of your appliances; if it's orange you do have a problem. However, blue does not necessarily mean it's safe. Do not heat your home with a gas oven.

Check the flue, is it blocked? Do you have creeping plants growing up your walls? Are birds nesting in your flue? Completely remove these obstructions from the flue area and fit a guard to stop any birds nesting. Get your flue checked to make sure it is drawing properly.

Do you have a horizontal gas grill? Older appliances can be problematic, plus these can be particularly hazardous. Get it checked to make certain it is working properly or use the electric toaster instead.

Is there adequate ventilation? Check your air bricks or trickle vents. Have you had double glazing fitted? If the appliances in your home do not have enough air they will produce carbon monoxide.

Do not use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove or other gasoline or charcoal burning device inside your home, basement and garage or near a window. Do not run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house.

Has your heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil or coal burning appliances been checked? Do it every year, by a qualified technician. Don't leave it to chance. But remember you're only verifying that they are working properly at the moment they are checked. Get protection year round, fit a CO detector with a low level alarm.

Do you suffer from unexplained illnesses? Go to your doctor and get a CohB test if you suspect carbon monoxide exposure. Seek prompt medical attention if you are feeling dizzy, lightheaded or nauseated.

We all feel better on holiday. If you feel especially invigorated it may be that you have been removed from the source of the poison. If your health goes into decline on your return it may be that it's not just post holiday blues, you may be suffering the ill effects from being poisoned from carbon monoxide in your home.

The most important thing that you can do to protect yourself and your family from the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning is to get a [carbon monoxide detector alarm](#) with a low level indicator. Check or replace the battery each spring or fall. If your detector sounds, evacuate your home and immediately call 911.

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Message from the Risk Manager

We had a hard time coming up with a topic for this newsletter so if any of you have suggestions, please send them. Eventually, we decided on a slightly different approach where the front page is used as a reminder about carbon monoxide, which has been covered several times, and the second page addresses a different topic. We are also adding a third page devoted to policy. We want to use this space to raise awareness of some of the policies that you might not think about every day, but you should be familiar with as you can be held accountable if you are found in violation. And, just so you don't think we are overwhelming you with too much information, we are going to a bi-monthly schedule for the newsletter rather than monthly. A lot of time and effort goes into this newsletter as we try to bring you the latest and most accurate information on a variety of safety and health topics and time has become an issue. We will strive with the new schedule to be more prompt in publishing this newsletter. Your feedback, good or bad, about these changes is appreciated.

Darlene

SLEEP AND YOUR HEALTH

I think we all know that not getting enough sleep can leave you feeling tired and irritable. Sleep deprivation can also contribute to lack of concentration, mistakes and even injuries and accidents both on and off the job. Now, recent studies are indicating a link between not getting enough sleep and illnesses. Both minor such as the common cold as well and serious diseases such as heart disease and cancer. Researchers haven't yet determined the cause behind this link but they speculate that sleep deprivation or disturbances may reduce the ability of the immune system to function at peak levels thus leaving the body more susceptible to illness. While some scientists dispute these findings and attribute the illnesses to factors other than lack of sleep, I think we can all agree that it would be great to get a good night's sleep, awake refreshed and ready to meet the day. You may not be able to eliminate all the factors that interfere with your sleep, but you can adopt habits and create an environment that encourages a restful sleep.

TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

- Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day, including weekends and days off.
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine – do the same things each night: a warm bath, relaxing music or reading
- Avoid eating or drinking large amounts near bedtime. Have a light dinner about 2 hours before bedtime and limit the amount you drink so that you aren't waking for trips to the bathroom
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol in the evening. It can take many hours to eliminate the stimulant effects of caffeine and although many think alcohol helps, it actually disrupts sleep
- Exercise regularly but not within 3 – 4 hours of bedtime as this could make getting to sleep more difficult
- Make your sleeping area cool, dark, quiet and comfortable: Use light blocking shades, a sleep mask, ear plugs, blankets, a fan, a humidifier or other devices to create an environment to suit your needs.
- If possible, sleep primarily at night – avoid or limit daytime naps to about a half-hour around mid afternoon
- Choose a comfortable mattress and pillow: We all have different definitions of "comfortable" so make sure yours feels good to you. You may need to restrict children and pets from sleeping with you as they are often disruptive
- Stop tossing and turning: Make a conscious decision to deal with problems or worries after a good night's sleep and then let them go. If you still can't fall asleep after 15 – 20 minutes, get up and do something else then go back to bed when you are tired. Stressing about not sleeping will only make it worse.

SHIFT WORK: It is especially difficult to get enough restful sleep when you work different or changing shifts. There is no perfect solution but these tips can still help. You just have to adjust them to your time schedule. Also, make sure family and friends understand (or at least accept) that just because you are at home, doesn't mean you are available. You may not be able to attend every activity because you must sleep during their normal waking hours.

Nearly everyone has occasional sleepless nights. But if you have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep that occurs on a regular or frequent basis, see your doctor to determine what might be the cause of your sleep problem and how it might be treated.

Foods That Help Sleep

That warm (or cold) glass of milk before bed really does help you sleep. Milk and other dairy foods, as well as oats, bananas, poultry and peanuts contain the amino acid tryptophan which the body converts to melatonin and serotonin – both of which are thought to induce sleep.

The best food to encourage restful sleep would be a light bedtime snack including mostly carbohydrate with a small amount of protein. This high-carbohydrate, low-protein combination is thought to increase the availability of tryptophan to your brain, which helps it make more melatonin and serotonin.

Some examples include:

- A small bowl of oatmeal or cereal with low-fat milk
- Yogurt with granola sprinkled on top
- Half bagel, crackers or a piece of toast with peanut butter, 1 ounce of cheese or a slice of deli turkey on top
- Sliced apple with 1 ounce of cheese

However, be careful and don't eat too much protein before bedtime. Protein-rich foods also contain another amino acid, tyrosine that stimulates brain activity.

Policy Highlight

Risk Management Safety and Loss Prevention Manual Page 61

F. ITEMS PROHIBITED FROM BEING CARRIED IN COLUMBIA COUNTY VEHICLES: The following items are not authorized for transport in vehicles belonging to Columbia County.

1. Any item classified as contraband or illegal substance. (Exception: Public Safety Officers when in the execution of their legal and expected duties.)
2. Firearms or weapons of any type, except by Public Safety Officers who are certified and hold a position of employment by Columbia County as a certified Public Safety Officer (i.e.: Sheriff Department Deputies/Investigators, Magistrate Marshals, Arson Investigator and officials of the DA's office).
3. Alcoholic beverages (Except as contraband transported by Law Enforcement.)

Discussion points regarding this Policy:

Obtaining a gun permit through Probate Court does not allow you to carry your weapon in your county vehicle; only those who are certified Public Safety Officers and hired by Columbia County in such capacity are allowed weapons in the county vehicle. We do not have any exceptions to this policy. Certified officers receive both initial and intensive ongoing training not only in the use of the weapon but also training specific to when use would be appropriate as well as ways of diffusing situations and alternative methods of control. No other positions receive this type of training.

If you feel threatened during the course of your job, notify your supervisor, manager and/or division director or other appropriate official (including Risk Management) so that a reasonable solution can be determined. There are many different measures that can be taken such as making sure at least two employees are always present, panic buttons, reconfiguration of work spaces, change of procedures, law enforcement escort, etc. to reduce or remove the threat and keep you safe without the liability of arming employees outside the law enforcement area.

Should you willingly choose to violate this policy and the weapon is discovered you may be facing disciplinary action up to and including termination. In the event that an incident has occurred and the weapon was used in some manner that resulted in a liability claim against you, coverage from the county's policy may be denied and you would be personally responsible to defend and/or pay any judgment rendered.

Also, as a reminder on transport of alcoholic beverages: this includes any and all alcoholic beverages for any reason and any length of time. Even that permissible stop at the grocery store on your way home (for those authorized to take home the county vehicle) to pick up a few items: don't forget and grab that six-pack of beer or bottle of wine to go with dinner. This is a violation and disciplinary action may result. Don't take a chance just for the sake of convenience or saving a little time. If you are buying any alcoholic beverages, wait until you are in your personal vehicle. Don't carry them in the county vehicle.

Up Coming Events

Each program is advertised by Risk Management and is available to employees of Columbia County Board of Commissioners and the city employees of Grovetown and Harlem. Additionally, the Defensive Driving Courses may be attended by immediate family members of employees, on a space available basis, for a nominal fee.

Pre-registration is required.

For additional information or to register contact Risk Management. 706-312-7475

Safety Review Board April 16, 2009

Defensive Driving March 17, 2009
Course – 8 hour April 21, 2009

Defensive Driving
Course – 4 hour

CPR/AED/First Aid February 17, 2009

County Office Closed

FEBRUARY 2009

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Newsy Notes

- One of the reasons red roses are so popular is because many men don't know that much about other flowers.
- Women are catching up to men in their flower purchases on Valentine's Day; though women buy most of the flowers the rest of the year.

