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New law aims to protect against carbon monoxide

By: Ed Scannell

GREENSBORO – A new state law goes into effect Jan. 1 that requires carbon monoxide detectors be installed in most rental units.

The law is aimed at preventing serious injury or death from what safety officials call "the silent killer."

The new law applies to most rental properties.

"A working carbon monoxide detector shall be installed on every level, at least one on each level of the occupancy in any unit that has a fossil fuel burning heating device such as a gas furnace, fuel oil burning furnace," said Asst. Chief David Douglas of the Greensboro Fire Department.

The law also applies if one of your appliances, such as a stove or water heater, burns a fossil fuel such as natural gas, or if you have an attached garage or a fireplace.

"If you had an all-electric occupancy with a heat pump and electric water heater, but you had a wood burning fireplace, that would drive a carbon monoxide detector requirement also," said Douglas.

Douglas said carbon monoxide poisoning can make you sick and even kill you – and it's preventable.

"The first measure of prevention is simply to have your heating unit checked each year to make sure it's not cracked and make sure you don't have a problem with your fireplace," said Douglas. "The next is early warning."

Birch Management has been installing detectors on about 600 rentals it manages.

"We sent out a letter to our owners back in August alerting them to the change in the law, giving them the opportunity to install them themselves or have us install them," said the company's Lee Porter.

Detectors can be electrically hardwired or battery-operated but must be approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.

"They would install it, send us the documentation so we could make sure that they were covered from a liability standpoint and installing the proper one," said Porter.

Porter said while installing these carbon monoxide detectors will be an expense for owners, these detectors could prove to be a lifesaver.

"I do think it's a good idea for those whose home meets a criteria have one installed in their home," said Porter.

A similar law goes into effect January 2011 that will impact some homeowners. A change in the residential building code will require carbon monoxide detectors be placed in all new homes.

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