

Carbon monoxide mishap kills Markham man

Poison seeps into home after car accidentally left running in garage

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A man in his 70s was found dead yesterday and his wife was sent to hospital after the couple accidentally left a car running in their garage, allowing carbon monoxide to seep into their Markham home.

A relative entered the home in the 9th Line and Hwy. 7 area yesterday morning to check up on the couple. But when the pair was found, the woman was in a deep sleep on her bed and the man was on the floor.

When the duo couldn't be roused, the person called 911.

Emergency officials arrived at about 10 a.m. but the man, who was reported to be 73, was pronounced dead at the scene. His wife, reported to be 69, was rushed to hospital and is expected to recover. Names of the victims were not immediately released.

Although York Regional Police do not want to speculate on whether the death could have been prevented, a series of misunderstandings made the situation more tragic, said Det. Const. Adam Daviduke.

"They had intentions to go out and got distracted," he said.

The couple had left the car running with the garage door open while they were getting ready, he explained, but then they changed their minds. Using a remote opener, they shut the garage door, forgetting the car was running, he said.

Daviduke added it is unclear how long the car was left running and that a coroner is still trying to pinpoint the time of death.

One carbon monoxide detector was found inside the home, but it was not working properly, Daviduke said. "There was a misunderstanding by the homeowner thinking that the smoke alarm was a combination," he explained.

The couple believed a ceiling-mounted smoke detector also acted as a carbon monoxide detector, so when their individual unit ran out of batteries, they chose

not to change it.

Carbon monoxide detectors are mandatory, and experts suggest installing one on every floor.

"Check twice a year. And when you check your smoke detector, check your carbon monoxide. If they're not hard-wired, replace the batteries."

In December, a series of serious carbon monoxide incidences, including the deaths of an OPP officer and her family in Woodstock, prompted Toronto Fire Services to issue a public safety alert.

According to the written statement, dated Dec. 11, firefighters had responded to about 3,000 carbon monoxide-related incidences in Toronto in the past year.

On Dec. 1, emergency officials were called to Const. Laurie Hawkins' home after she failed to turn up to work. Hawkins, 41, was found clinging to life beside the bodies of her husband, daughter and son. She died eight days later.

A plugged exhaust ventilation pipe was blamed.

Carbon monoxide is often dubbed the silent killer because it is colourless, odourless and tasteless. In the home, it is commonly produced by gas or oil furnaces, space and water heaters, dryers, ovens, wood stoves, fireplaces and other appliances that use wood, gas, oil, kerosene, charcoal, propane or coal.

According to the Canada Safety Council, it is the leading cause of fatal poisoning in North America.