

# Natural Gas

## Control What You Can't See

It's invisible and relatively cheap, so many people take natural gas for granted. Despite its convenience, natural gas can pose serious safety risks. Read on to learn how you can reduce those risks in your home.

### Rely on Professionals

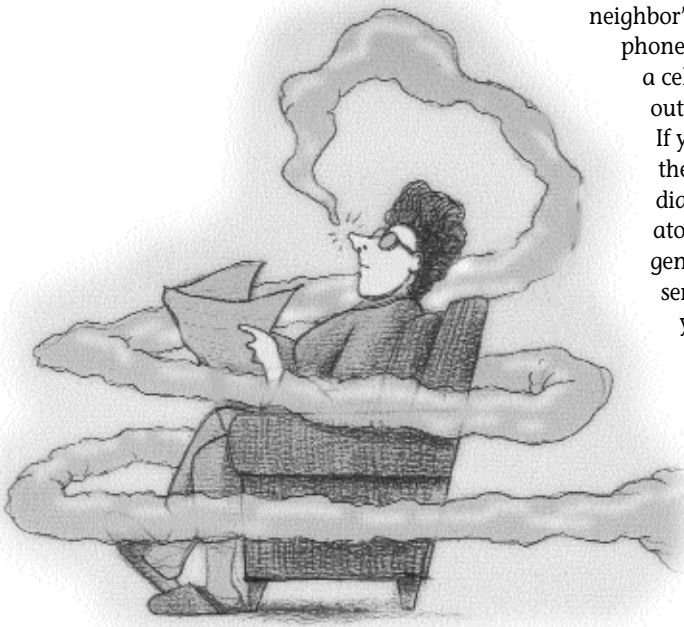
Buy only those gas-using appliances with the label of a nationally recognized testing organization. The label usually includes a blue star. Beware of so-called "gas-saving" devices. They may not save gas, and they can be dangerous. Have all gas appliances installed, vented to the outside and serviced by licensed or qualified professionals. Even if you never smell leaking gas, get a periodic inspection of your gas-burning equipment by the gas company or a licensed plumber. They can check your home's insulation and ventilation for safety and energy efficiency as well.

### When You Smell a Gas Leak

Although natural gas is odorless and colorless, a distinctive odor is added to the gas by the supplier so you can smell a leak immediately. A faint odor of gas may mean that a pilot light has gone out. In most cases, it can be relit safely and easily. However, a strong odor means you should open all nearby windows, avoid turning on any lights, including flashlights, and leave the house immediately. Don't start your car or light a cigarette, and put out any other flames, such as candles. Switching an electrical appliance on or off or using a phone could cause a dangerous spark, so leave them alone as well. Call

the gas company from a neighbor's home, from a phone booth, or from a cell phone once outdoors.

If you can't reach the gas company dial 911, the operator or the emergency response service used in your area. Stay out of the house until the leak has been found and fixed and there's no more gas smell.



### Safety Precautions Around Natural Gas

- Natural gas is not poisonous, but it's highly explosive. That's why it's important to take care of any gas leaks and get plenty of ventilation immediately.
- If natural gas burns without enough oxygen, one of its byproducts is carbon monoxide, a deadly gas. You can tell if gas is burning with the right mix of oxygen by the color of the flame, which should be blue. If the flame is not blue, have the appliance checked by the gas company or a plumber as soon as possible.
- Other flammable substances, such as gasoline, paint thinner and the contents of aerosol cans, might burn or explode if stored near gas-burning appliances, such as a water heater or furnace. Even balls of dust and cobwebs can ignite if they stray too near the burners. Keep the area around gas-burning appliances clear of all flammables.
- Keep a multipurpose (ABC-type) fire extinguisher handy.
- Don't hang anything from a gas pipe
- Use flexible gas supply lines wherever possible.
- Don't use your gas oven or stove to heat your kitchen.
- Avoid using a vacuum cleaner close to a gas flame.
- Strap or secure any gas appliance that may fall over or move during an earthquake.

### Home Maintenance Enhances Safety

Keep your gas range burners clean. You can remove the burners from the stove, clear the holes with a paper clip or piece of wire, wash them with water and detergent (never a cleaning solvent), rinse and thoroughly dry them before reinstalling them. Take care not to damage or change the settings on the air shutters or sleeves. These normally feed the right mix of oxygen to the gas flame as set by the gas company.

### Turning Natural Gas Off and On

Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions on gas-burning equipment. Know how to shut off gas both to individual appliances and to the entire house in case of an emergency, such as a fire or earthquake. However, shut off the valve at the main gas meter *only* in case of an emergency in your home. If the main shut-off requires a wrench or other tool, always keep one near the valve. Also, show anyone else living at home, including any older children, how to close an appliance's gas valve in the event of a *small* leak. Very young children should stay clear of gas-burning appliances and pipes altogether. Gas valves and pilot lights should only be turned on by representatives of a gas and electricity company.