

Around
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es downward, is loose or has incorrect material, have it corrected at once.

Once the furnace has activated, flue gases should flow readily up the flue. Put your hand near the area where the flue draws household air (an open gap just under where the flue exits the furnace called a draft hood) and feel for any back drafting or spillage. While you are at it, perform this same test at the water heater as well. Don't touch metal flues as they can burn you quickly. If you feel any spillage from either flue, have it serviced immediately. Note that you can't do this test with higher efficiency furnaces as they have a motor that purges the furnace of flue gases automatically.

During your annual furnace cleaning and inspection, insist that the flue be checked for blockages and ask your contractor to perform a full back draft test. As homes have become better insulated

against the weather, problems with inadequate fresh air, which contributes to back drafting, become more frequent.

Other symptoms of inadequate fresh air can be pilot lights that blow out and smoky odors off your fireplace. In new construction, it is now required to install a fresh air intake to the cold air return of the furnace. Many owners of older homes find this necessary to install once they upgrade weatherproofing features such as new windows and better insulation. Your furnace contractor can usually install a fresh air supply and balancing damper for \$200 to \$300.

Have you remodeled?

Furnaces and water heaters are usually placed together, for convenience of a shared flue and utilities. Both appliances need lots of oxygen for combustion purposes. If your furnace and water heater

are in an enclosed room, you may be risking carbon monoxide poisoning. An undersized closed room won't provide enough combustion air, particularly on cold days when the demands are greatest.

If an appliance cannot draw enough combustion air from the house, it may draw it down the flue, pulling unsafe flue gases into the structure. Worse, those flue gases could be pulled into the furnace and distributed readily through the home. If your furnace is in an enclosed area and has a non-louvered door, open it wide until a furnace contractor can calculate combustion air needs.

Furnace flues are vital to safe and proper operation of your home heating system. Proper installation and an annual inspection are important to your safety. Make sure, when you have your furnace cleaned, that the contractor is prepared to

verify the safety of your furnace's flue system and combustion air requirements during the inspection process.

Other maintenance items are important to the function of your furnace. In our next column, we will discuss some of the most common defects discovered on home inspections. In the meantime, for our friends who enjoy the Internet, a delightful site called the "Furnace Man" can be found at: <http://www.lmg.com/twoharvests/furnman.html>

Around the House, by Rick Bowling of the AmeriSpec home inspection service, 1378 S. Main in Plymouth, instructs homeowners about the basics of home maintenance and repair. If you have a question, write to: Around the House/At Home, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Despite stories your Christmas poinsettias are not poisonous

Because of one unconfirmed incident that was reported almost 70 years ago, the poinsettia has suffered unwarranted criticism, its safety in constant question.

The story that started this misinformation dates back to 1919 when a 2-year-old child of an Army officer sta-

tioned in Hawaii died. It was suspected that he had eaten a poinsettia leaf. Thus, the conclusion that the poinsettia is poisonous. The lack of sound evidence of the poinsettia's toxicity and exaggerated notions about this beautiful Christmas plant led to a scientific investigation.

The conclusions of the investigation have led to a clean bill of health for the poinsettia.

Research was performed in 1971 by members of the Academic Faculty of Entomology at Ohio State University. Acceptable by the United States Con-

sumer Product Safety Commission in determining harmfulness to humans, the research was performed on rats. Concentrated doses of various portions of the poinsettia caused no change in behavior, no symptoms of toxicity and no mortality.

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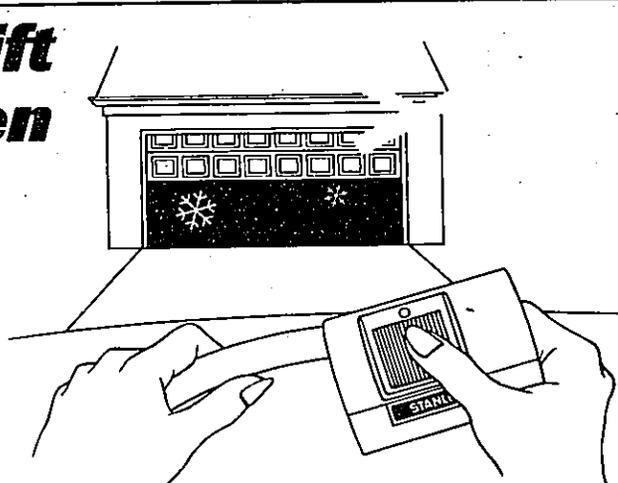
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