

- Provided by Black Hills Energy

Winter is looming, and it's time to make sure your heating system and gas appliances are working properly before the weather gets confining.

"Natural gas is safe, reliable energy and the heating fuel of choice in nearly 70 million homes," said Black Hills Energy's interim general manager, Lon Meyer. "That's more than half the homes in the United States."



A professional should inspect your heating system and appliances each fall. It yields the same positive results as regular upkeep on your car: safe operation for peace of mind, and efficient operation for a lower energy bill.

It's also time to replace the batteries in smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors, and to make sure their limited lifetime hasn't expired. Hardware stores generally carry them, and they're well worth the modest price.

A thorough inspection includes the flue pipes, from the appliance or furnace, through the roof to the vent cap. The flue is the outlet for carbon monoxide, a gas created naturally during the

combustion process for natural gas, propane, wood or any other burning fuel. At elevated levels, carbon monoxide is a serious health issue.

Carbon monoxide can't be seen and is odorless. Signs of unsafe carbon monoxide levels can include, but aren't limited to, flu-like symptoms: a scratchy throat, runny nose, headache, drowsiness or nausea. Other possible indicators are an excess of humidity, such as frosted windows, or a draft from the front of the furnace when it isn't running.

"Safety is always our first concern, and we welcome questions about home heating safety or anything else related to your natural gas service from Black Hills Energy," Meyer said. "If you at all suspect you might have excess levels of carbon monoxide present, get everyone out of the building immediately and call 911 or the 24-hour Black Hills emergency line at 800-694-8989."