

# MAFES Dawg Tracks

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*Safety Tips: Using  
Natural Gas Safely*



Natural gas is a clean, efficient fuel that adds comfort and ease to our lives. We heat our homes, water for showers, cook our food, dry our clothes (those with gas dryers) and other uses. It is safe when we use it with proper care. Presently studies show that approximately 50% of all homes in the USA use natural gas as their main heating source.

As a heads-up” for a refresher and “memory-jogger,” we will review some facts that, hopefully, will help us to continue to enjoy the comforts of natural gas usage, as well as maintaining a positive safety attitude. As convenient as it is, we shouldn’t react to taking its use for granted.

As a pre-requisite to maintaining a safe heating system, as it begins to age, it is a prudent idea to employ a licensed heating contractor to come in and check the system for wear conditions and its safety. They will check your burners or heat exchangers to see if they are damaged. They will look at the flooring around the furnace for charring or blackening. If they find any of these conditions, they will probably recommend repairs or replacing the furnace, depending on the conditions.

## **Natural Gas Water Heater Safety Tips-**

- ✓ Water heaters installed in garages must be elevated so that the pilot or other source of ignition is a minimum of 18” above the floor or installed per local building codes or according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- ✓ Earthquakes, which we pray never happen, can play havoc with an unsecured water heater, causing them to topple over. A tip to prevent this, or just as an added safety feature, is to strap it to wall studs in a couple of locations, but not low enough to interfere with the control panel.
- ✓ Prevent scalding accidents by setting the thermostat no higher than the manufacturer’s instruction or even a bit lower.
- ✓ Assuming a replacement is needed, be sure to inquire in your search for a unit that has high efficiency ratings.
- ✓ Another consideration, when installing a replacement or a new one, is to suggest using an approved flexible metal appliance connector instead of the semi-rigid aluminum or copper gas tubing.

## **Gas Appliance Shut-off Valves-**

- ✓ For safety- a shut-off valve should be installed at every gas appliance.
- ✓ If a leak occurs at an appliance, this will allow you to shut off the gas for that specific appliance, as opposed to having to shut it off at the meter. Some valves require a wrench for the on and off valve.

## **How to Shut Off the Gas-**

- ✓ Get familiar with the location of your gas meter (immediately-if you don’t already know). It could be underground, in a cabinet, under the house or beside it.

- ✓ Keep a large adjustable wrench in a location close to the meter for quick and easy access or even attached with a chain to the meter, assuming the meter is located where it is not too accessible to kids.
- ✓ With the wrench to shut off the valve, insert the wrench on the valve and make a ¼ turn in either direction. The valve will then be cross-ways and parallel with the ground.

## **After an Emergency-**

- Do not turn off your meter unless you smell gas **or hear a leak**.
- Check your water heater and furnace vents. If the venting system is separated for whatever reason, it could leak hazardous fumes into the home. Signs of improperly vented appliances can be identified by moisture on the inside of windows or unusual odor when the appliance is in use.
- Do not use electrical appliances- not even a light switch until you’re sure there are no gas leaks.

## **If You Shut Off the Gas-**

- If you shut the gas off at the meter, leave it off.
- Do not turn it back on by yourself or anyone else. Have the gas company come out and turn it on and relight the pilot lights.

## **Furnace Safety-**

Obviously, it is just as important to keep your furnace running safely and efficiency.

## **Floor Furnaces-**

- ~Avoid lint build-up by vacuuming it on a regular basis.
- ~Avoid fires- keep rugs, furniture or any combustible materials away from the grill or blocking the air flow.

## **Wall Furnace-**

- Clean the burner compartment of built-in vented wall furnaces monthly to avoid the lint build-up.

## **Central Forced-Air Heating-**

- Most models have a filter that cleans the air before it goes into the heating/cooling system that circulates throughout the house. Maintain a clean filter so that the system is working at its best efficiency.
- Check the filter monthly or at least on a periodic basis so that the system can produce efficiently.
- When replacing a filter, be sure that the front panel door of the unit fits snugly. Do not operate the unit without the front panel door in place properly. The unit will be operating without the filtering system, and it is a possibility that it may create the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

## **IF YOU SUSPECT A LEAK-**

- ✓ Stay calm
- ✓ Don’t light a match, candle or cigarette
- ✓ Don’t turn on electric devices
- ✓ Move away from the suspected leak- Call the gas company or the local fire department