



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



Steve Leighton, Fire Chief

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Alarming Increase in Gas Leaks, Carbon Monoxide-Related Emergencies

Tahoe City, Calif. Mar. 7, 2023 –North Tahoe Fire reports an alarming increase in gas leaks, Carbon Monoxide (CO) related emergencies and other hazard-related emergencies resulting from the repeated storms and heavy snow. Since January 1, 2023, hazard calls have accounted for nearly 20% of non-EMS incidents. Firefighters are on a mission to empower the public with information on ways to prevent snow-related emergencies by properly maintaining mountain homes.

North Tahoe Firefighters are responding to a significant increase in CO emergencies throughout the region, many of which result in positive CO readings upon arrival, with occupants/patients showing symptoms of varied severity. Many of these incidents are the result of heavy snow build-up on combustion-appliance venting, buried foundation vents, and improper or snow-obstructed home generator ventilation systems. Gas leaks are also on the rise due to deeply buried propane tanks, above ground propane plumbing, and buried natural gas meters impacted by the snow. The repetitive freeze-and-thaw cycles following winter storms combined with the weight of the snowpack places glacial-like torsional stress on tanks and propane plumbing systems, causing dangerous leaks.

Roof snow shedding, which is always a danger to people and pets, is also a danger to gas meters, propane tanks and above ground gas plumbing, and another common cause of leaks. Gas leaks caused by snow removal efforts are also reported.

North Tahoe Fire urges residents to use caution while clearing snow from rooftops. “Be aware to stay well clear of the 240V power service drops that may be covered in snow by roof cornices,” said North Tahoe Fire Chief Steve Leighton. “An aluminum shovel or ladder that comes into contact with a power service drop can easily electrocute and kill a person.”

Propane tanks/cylinders, gas lines, and regulators and appliance vents need to be continuously maintained throughout the winter by keeping them cleared of snow and ice buildup. The district recommends the following:

- Take caution when clearing snow from roofs and protect propane tanks or cylinders, propane lines, regulators, and vents from falling snow.
- When plowing, snow blowing or shoveling, do not push or pile snow around a tank, meter, regulator, or piping.



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- Use caution when removing snow from the tanks and cylinders, gas piping and regulators; don't use sharp tools or force. Carefully clear heavy snow until the tank and equipment are visible, complete final clearing with soft tools such as brooms or brushes to prevent damage to equipment and components.
- Tanks should not be allowed to run dry; doing so may require an inspection of all gas appliances before the tank can be refilled. Be sure to place refill orders before the tank reaches 30-40 percent and keep tanks clear of snow with a path accessible to gas suppliers.
- Propane smells like rotten eggs, and propane leaking into snow may release more of a musty odor.
- Anytime there is an odor of propane or natural gas, call 911 immediately.
- Watch this [Propane Snow Safety PSA](#) (2019), courtesy of Placer County Sheriff and North Tahoe Fire.



An image of a properly maintained propane tank, showing the above ground plumbing that is vulnerable to the forces of snow loading and torsional stress. Some plumbing is not flexible and more prone to failure.



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An image of a properly maintained bypass vent on a gas tank, which needs to be kept free of ice.



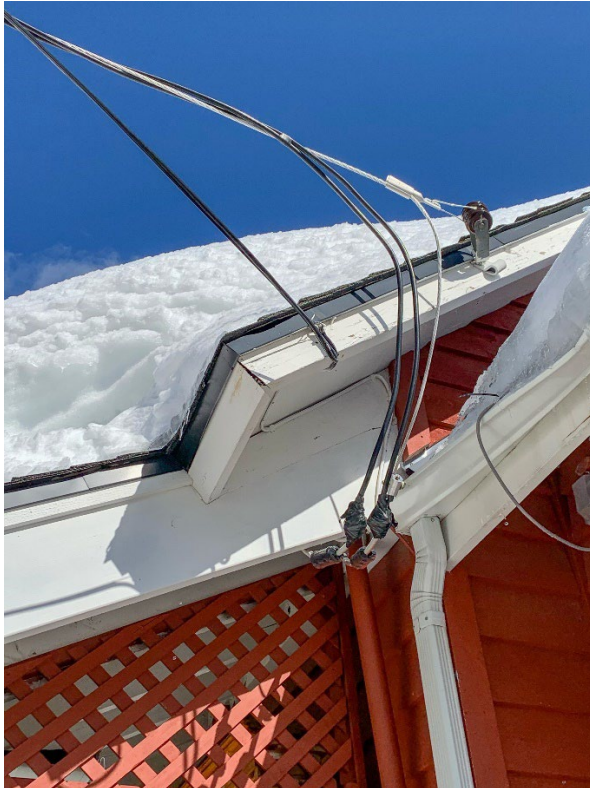
An image of combustion ventilation that is soon to be obstructed by snow. If left unattended, the obstruction could result in CO poisoning of the occupants.



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An image of a gas meter being cleared of snow to prevent a gas leak.



An image of 240V power service drops that may be covered in snow by roof cornices. If contact is made by an aluminum shovel or ladder when the snow is being cleared, the results could be fatal.

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