

What's the Risk?

Snow Blocking Appliance Vents



THE ISSUE

When snow accumulates around the fresh air intake or exhaust system of high-efficiency appliances it can affect their safe operation and put lives at risk. Exhaust gases from fossil fuel-burning appliances (e.g. using natural gas, propane, or fuel oil) must be released outside to allow the appliances to work properly and prevent the buildup of harmful gases in a house. New high-efficiency appliances such as furnaces, water heaters or fireplaces have vents through exterior walls for exhaust gases to exit and fresh air intake pipes that support combustion inside the furnace. Both must remain clear of any obstruction for the appliance to operate properly.



WHAT'S THE RISK?

Since exhaust systems and fresh air intakes of some appliances are located near ground level, there is the potential for snow to accumulate near them and impact their operation. If the snow is deep enough to block the exhaust or intake pipes, harmful gases may back up in the system and escape into the house. This could cause carbon monoxide or other harmful gases to accumulate inside the home leading to serious health issues or even death.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

To minimize the risk, homeowners are encouraged to do the following:

- Remove snow, ice, and other obstructions in the immediate area surrounding the exhaust and intake systems
- Check exhaust and air intake vents to ensure they are not blocked by snow following a heavy snowfall or drifting caused by wind
- Remove any obstructions around the exhaust vent or air intake so there is approximately 48 inches (1.2 meters) of clearance in all directions
- Contact a qualified contractor who is knowledgeable with this type of venting system to complete an inspection and offer solutions before ice or snow becomes an issue if the homeowner is not comfortable doing so

