

Propane Heater Safety for Members of UBCP/ACTRA

Many performers are aware that the BC Motion Picture Industry has experienced multiple serious incidents with propane and propane-fired heaters. The vast majority of these past incidents have involved Background Performers. These workers experienced near misses and serious injuries including burns and carbon monoxide poisoning as a result of these incidents. What many industry workers may not be aware of is that in 1999, a film industry worker, Barry Crowhurst, died at the age of 39, as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning. This death was directly related to the improper use of a propane-fired heater.

This bulletin is specifically intended to alert UBCP/ACTRA members to the hazards associated with the use of propane and propane-fired heaters in tents, and to outline safe work practices.

Propane Heaters on Set or Location

1. HAZARD WARNING

Improper installation or use of Propane-fired heaters can result in death, serious injury and property loss or damage from fire, explosion, burns, asphyxiation, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

2. LIGHTING AND USE OF PROPANE-FIRED HEATERS

Only people who have read the manufacturer's instructions and have been properly trained should assemble, light, adjust or operate propane heaters.

UBCP/ACTRA members should not handle the heaters or propane tanks.

3. PROPER PLACEMENT OF PROPANE-FIRED HEATERS

Keep combustibles such as building materials, paper, fabric including table cloths, tent flaps, etc. a minimum of 1.37 metres (4 feet, 6 inches) away from the heater.

People and costumes should also be kept a minimum of 1.37 metres (4 feet, 6 inches) away from the heater. DO NOT stand close to the heater to warm up!

When using a 50,000 btu heater (a common size used by the industry) ensure that the heater is 1.37 metres (4 feet, 6 inches) away from the top and sides of the tent or any other potentially combustible surface or material. Different sized heaters will have different space requirements.

Heaters must be placed on a firm, flat surface. Heaters must be equipped with a tip-over switch.

The propane tank should be located at least 6 feet away from the heater and must be restrained or secured to prevent accidental tip-overs. Small tanks are generally placed in milk crates.

Please note: large tanks also need to be secured.

Do NOT use propane-fired heaters in a tightly enclosed area. These heaters can produce carbon monoxide if adequate ventilation is not maintained.

Two openings directly to the outdoors MUST be provided, one high and one low, on opposite sides of the area to be heated. Each opening must be at least 3 inches for every 1000 btu. Therefore, for one 50,000 btu heater, two openings of at least .093 square metres (1 square foot) at each end are required. Different sized heaters will have different requirements.

NEVER close the tent flaps due to the high risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

4. MAINTENANCE AND INSPECTION OF PROPANE-FIRED HEATERS

Heaters must be inspected before EACH use.

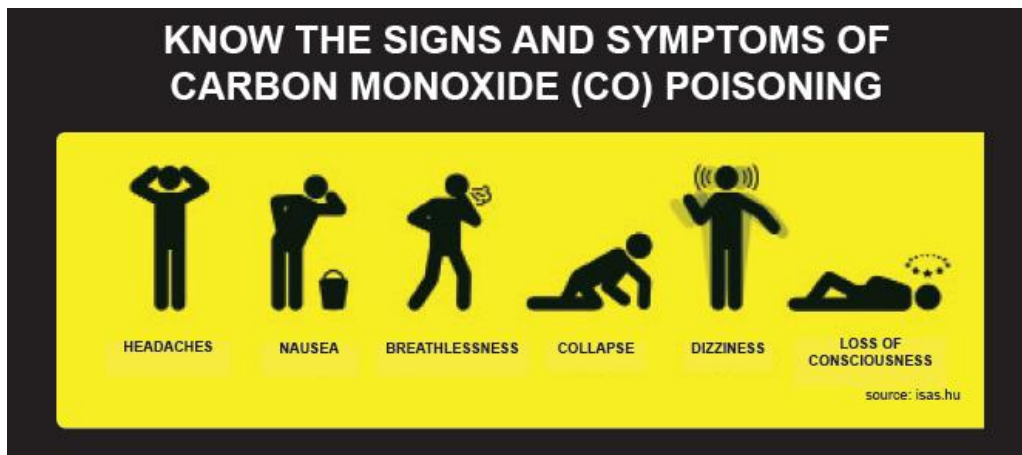
If there is any evidence of damage or a piece of equipment doesn't function properly, report it immediately to your supervisor (Background Coordinator, AD or Locations Dept.).

5. THE DANGERS OF CARBON MONOXIDE

Propane produces carbon monoxide. Sometimes called "the silent killer" - it's a non-irritating, colourless, odourless, tasteless gas that is produced by burning a carbon fuel such as propane, natural gas, wood, charcoal, alcohol, kerosene, or gasoline. When these fuels are burned in an area that is properly ventilated, the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning is low, but it is still important for everyone to know the signs of the presence of carbon monoxide and what to do if they suspect it is present.

6. DANGER SIGNS OF CARBON MONOXIDE EXPOSURE INCLUDE:

- Flu-like symptoms such as headache, dizziness, drowsiness, fatigue, confusion, nausea or vomiting, breathlessness, fainting and in very high concentrations, even death.
- Be suspicious of anyone with food poisoning or flu-like symptoms in a propane heated tent and never administer 'Gravol' to anyone on set who feels nauseous until carbon monoxide poisoning has been ruled out by First Aid or a medical professional.



7. IF YOU OR ANYONE ELSE EXPERIENCE SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS OF CO POISONING:

1. Evacuate Space immediately
2. Inform supervisor
3. Seek medical attention with First Aid if any symptoms are present
4. DO NOT RE-ENTER the space until it has been declared safe