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For Immediate Release

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Winter Months Can Unleash a Silent Killer

Illinois Poison Center Warns About the Dangers of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

(Chicago) – As the weather cools down, home furnaces turn up and the chance for carbon monoxide poisoning increases. Carbon monoxide earned its name as the “silent killer” because it is an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas that kills about 500 people in the United States each year. During the winter months in 2006, the Illinois Poison Center hotline handled 1,052 calls related to carbon monoxide.

“Carbon monoxide can kill you even before you realize it’s in your home,” says Michael Wahl, MD, managing medical director of the Illinois Poison Center. “It’s important for a professional to inspect your furnace annually and for you to test the CO detectors in your home monthly, it could save your life.”

Common sources of carbon monoxide are furnaces, space heaters, gas stoves, cars and charcoal grills. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning mimic flu-like symptoms including: headache, nausea, vomiting and dizziness. More serious symptoms are drowsiness, confusion and heart irregularities, which may lead to convulsions, unconsciousness, brain damage and even death.

Tips to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Install carbon monoxide detectors on every floor of your home
- Hire a trained professional to inspect, clean and tune-up furnaces, vents and chimneys annually
- Never heat your home with a gas oven or stove
- Turn off space heaters while sleeping
- Never leave the car running in the garage, even if the garage door is open
- After a CO alarm goes off, move to fresh air, either outside or to an open window, account for every household member and call 911

*For more information about carbon monoxide poisoning log onto: www.illinoispoisoncenter.org or call the toll free Illinois Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222.

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The IPC is the only certified, regional poison center in Illinois, serving more than 12 million residents in 102 counties – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222.

The toll-free hot line will connect callers with a local poison center from anywhere in the United States. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice to the public and health care professionals on alcohol and drug misuse, medication problems, bites and stings, occupational accidents and other poisonings.