

Our January meeting took place via Zoom on Wednesday, January 6, 2021, at 6:30pm. Our meetings used to last about 2 hours. It is surprising that we can limit our meetings to the 40 minute Zoom limit now. We don't have time for the usual banter. Yet, we are setting priorities, getting more organized, spreading necessary jobs among all of our members, and getting done what needs to get done. Even our training has become virtual. Still, we look forward to the day when we can meet, work, and train together again. Our next meeting will be via Zoom on Wednesday, February 3, at 6:30pm.

In the December issue of the Cotton Chronicle, I shared that this department was trying to secure funding to purchase an AutoPulse. This device is a backboard with an attached machine that can automatically perform CPR at the correct rate and depth for the patient. The AutoPulse will increase the survival rate of cardiac arrest victims in our area. The problem is the price tag of \$17,000. I asked the community for help. I have stated before that this community always helps us when we need it and, again, you came to our aid! Thank you so much to Stan and Jane Johnston and Dave Hartwick for your very generous donations for the AutoPulse! We really appreciate your support! Thank you to Arrlette Krog who wrote and submitted a grant request to Lake Country Power's Round Up Grant program. We were awarded a \$2000 grant from them! The donations and the grant enabled us to make our first payment for the AutoPulse. It is on the way!

We have finished our renovation of the office in the Bass Lake Firehall. All of the work and most of the materials needed were donated! Thank you to Tyler Swor for the beautiful floor. Thank you to Bruce Degan for the beautiful carpentry work on the window. The office is nicely organized now, which helps us be more efficient in paperwork, financial matters, maintenance and equipment logs, and service to our community. Next on our list is our meeting room. We want to get this room spruced up before we start meeting in person again. Hopefully, we can show off all of our updates at National Night Out this year!

The Covid vaccine was made available to our EMR's. The rest of our department should be able to be vaccinated soon. We will still need to wear all of our PPE when responding to calls. This is to keep ourselves, as well as you, safe. Wearing a mask is really not hard. It is even nice on a cold day, or night, because it helps keep the face warm and the cold air out of the nose. Plus, wearing a mask seems to decrease the number of flu cases. Don't give up wearing a mask just because you have been vaccinated! Let us all work together to conquer this COVID scourge!

Wintertime is the time of year when carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is more common. There were 14 deaths attributed to carbon monoxide poisoning in MN last year. People who are asleep or drunk can die of CO poisoning before they show any symptoms. In October of 2019, a man and his dog died in Duluth because of CO poisoning. Pets cannot detect this gas, and they will succumb to it faster than humans. Carbon monoxide is an invisible, odorless gas that is produced when fuels such as gasoline, wood, coal, propane, oil, and methane burn incompletely. Heating and cooking appliances can produce CO if they are damaged or used for other purposes than what they are intended for. Cars, trucks, tractors, lawn mowers, snowblowers, and other vehicles can produce CO. If these motors run in an enclosed area, dangerous levels of this gas can accumulate. When a person is exposed to low levels of carbon monoxide, they may experience flu-like symptoms. Continued exposure, or higher levels of CO, leads to dizziness, mental confusion, blurred vision, severe headaches, fainting, and even death. This can happen within 2 hours. Carbon monoxide is known as the silent killer because the victim rarely realizes that he is being poisoned. Many times, the victim just feels tired, falls asleep, and never awakens.

There are things that can be done to lessen the chances of carbon monoxide poisoning. Gas or oil furnaces are the most frequent source of leaks. Make sure heating equipment has a good supply of fresh air for combustion. Check all connections to flue pipes and venting systems for cracks, gaps, rust corrosion or debris. Check the filters and filtering systems for dirt and blockages. Check the combustion chamber and heat exchanger for cracks, holes, metal fatigue or corrosion. Check the furnace flame, burners, and ignition systems. A yellow, flat, or lazy-looking flame in a furnace means that it is not burning efficiently and is releasing higher levels of carbon monoxide. Chimneys and venting systems should be checked for blockages caused by debris, animal nests, cracks, holes, or cave-ins. Fan systems should be inspected to make sure that CO is vented out. Check water heaters, clothes dryers, space heaters and wood burning stoves. Fireplace and stove pilot lights should be checked also. Do not use your oven to heat your home. Do not grill in a garage, even if the doors are open. Use battery-powered heaters and lights in tents, trailers, and mobile homes. Make sure garage doors are open if a motor is running. Never run a motor in an attached garage even with the doors open. A small 5 horsepower engine running in a 10,000 cubic foot room will take 7 minutes to produce fatal CO levels.

The most important thing that you can do is put carbon monoxide detectors in your home. CO detectors should be placed throughout your home, just like your smoke detectors. Put one near your furnace, water heater, and gas dryer. CO detectors should be placed on every level of your home that has fuel burning appliances, and also in or outside the sleeping areas. If there are multiple bedrooms adjoining a common hallway, a single detector in the hallway can provide protection. Do not put these detectors in humid areas such as bathrooms. Mount the carbon monoxide detectors on the wall less than 5 feet off the floor. You want to be notified of the presence of CO gas before it gets at nose level! Remember, carbon monoxide has no smell or taste. You will not be aware that you are being poisoned unless you have a carbon monoxide detector in your home. Change the batteries regularly and replace the unit every 2 years so that the sensor is fresh.

A carbon monoxide detector rarely goes off for no reason. A low battery will cause it to beep every 30 seconds. If a carbon monoxide detector is alarming, begin by opening windows and doors to get fresh air into the premises. Turn off appliances and sources of combustion. Call a qualified technician to fix the problem before restarting appliances. If anyone is experiencing symptoms of CO poisoning such as tiredness, headaches, dizziness, or vomiting, call the fire department and immediately move to a location outside in the fresh air. Do not re-enter the premises until it has been aired out and inspected.

Carbon monoxide poisons the body by displacing the oxygen in the blood that is needed by the organs and cells in your body. The carbon monoxide hooks on to the blood cells and kicks the oxygen off. Carbon monoxide has a half-life of 5 hours in a person. This means that it will take 5 hours of breathing fresh air to get half of the carbon monoxide out of your system. As long as CO is in your system, damage is being done to your cells and organs. Blood samples can be taken to determine how much CO is in your blood. The carboxyhemoglobin levels must be below 4% to stop the poisoning. Quick treatment is vital to prevent lifelong nerve and vascular complications and death. The air that we breathe contains 21% oxygen. The only way to treat CO poisoning is to administer 100% oxygen in an attempt to knock the CO off of the oxygen receptors in the blood cells. This can be done with a facemask delivering 100% oxygen in mild cases, a ventilator in more severe cases, or a hyperbaric oxygen chamber. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy means that the victim is placed in a chamber where the air pressure is 2-3 times higher than normal and administered 100% oxygen. This higher air pressure forces the CO off of the cell and allows the oxygen to bind there again. Even a minor case of carbon monoxide poisoning can cause serious complications such as damage to the brain, heart, and other organs if left untreated. It is important to get help as soon as you become exposed to the CO gas. You must get to a medical facility where your blood levels can be checked and treatment started. Do not drive yourself because you could pass out from the progressing, untreated poisoning. Get outdoors immediately and call 911. Our department carries face masks and oxygen tanks. We will be there to help!