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Contact:
John Zaher (631) 207-1057, ext. 8
Hank Russell (631) 207-1057, ext. 4
PRMG New York

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Bob Williams Urges Fire Alarm Industry to Change Low-Level Carbon Monoxide Thresholds

Company President Believes it is Crucial To Design Alarms and Detectors That Inform The Public of Small Traces of CO

CENTEREACH, NY —Carbon monoxide (CO) detection and awareness is on the rise; however, Bob Williams, President of Briscoe Protective Systems Inc. believes that there are still many important matters that need to be addressed, such as creating alarms and detectors that alert consumers in the early stages of carbon monoxide levels to prevent fatalities.

Carbon monoxide is measured in Parts Per Million (PPM) and the listed thresholds for occupant notification for both residential alarms and commercial detectors currently have the same standards. Rather than waiting until the required Underwriters Laboratory (UL) levels are reached, Mr. Williams believes it is imperative to inform the public on the lowest levels of CO, since UL currently does not have a standard for low-level carbon monoxide accumulation.

Research has shown that prolonged repeated exposure to CO, even at levels previously believed to be low, are capable of producing many negative physical, cognitive, and emotional health effects. Furthermore, some researchers have suggested that CO poisoning goes unnoticed or is not diagnosed correctly because many symptoms are similar to those of the flu.

“Having either CO alarms or CO system detectors alert building occupants when CO is in its early stages of accumulation well before it has a chance to build to a critical level is important,” says Mr. Williams. According to current UL requirements, alarms and detectors will only alert people to the following ranges: 30 PPM for more than 30 days, 70 PPM for 60-240 minutes, 150 PPM for 10-50 minutes and 400 PPM for 4-15 minutes.

UL standards are at odds with exposure limit thresholds of both the EPA Residential Standard (not to exceed 35 PPM in one hour or 9 PPM in eight hours), and the OSHA Workplace Standard (not to exceed 50 PPM over eight hours). As of now, neither CO detectors nor CO alarms will activate or give any type of warning of CO accumulation at recommended EPA and OSHA thresholds until 30 days. When responding to a CO emergency, firefighters are required to put on their masks — even when a small trace of CO is detected; therefore, Mr. Williams believes that the public should be notified to take these precautions as well.

On May 30, an Advanced Medical Technician entered a Dunkin’ Donuts in Carle Place to order a cup of coffee. While waiting on line, a portable CO detector he was carrying on him went off; it detected 35 PPM of CO. He told everyone to evacuate the restaurant and called the fire department. Firefighters at the scene found a clogged air vent as the cause.

“For conditions over 30 PPM to 70 PPM, an alarm is not required to be sounded for these devices until after 30 days,” Mr. Williams said. “That means that, if the 35 PPM condition in Dunkin’ Donuts remained at that level and if there were UL-listed detectors or alarms installed, with or without a digital display, they would not have alarmed until after 30 days.”

As the recent death of Steve Nelson, who succumbed to CO poisoning at his Huntington restaurant after weeks of feeling sick, has shown, Mr. Williams strongly believes that alarms and detectors should begin alerting people at even the lowest levels. After a recent press conference for the signing of the Steve Nelson Safety Act in Suffolk County, Steve’s partner, John Largan,

described Steve's symptoms in the days leading up to his tragic exposure, which included a rash and headaches. These symptoms can be attributed to prolonged low-level exposure to CO.

"I feel that higher-level warnings just aren't enough and it is our responsibility, as an industry, to do more to protect consumers, and meet our customers' expectations for safety from the main cause of gas poisoning in the U.S.," says Mr. Williams.

For more information, call Denise Rueda at 1 (888) BRISCOE (274-7263) extension 214 or visit www.briscoeprotective.com.

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Since 1978, Briscoe Protective Systems Inc. and its team of experienced professionals have brought world-class solutions, with fire and security alarm products and services of superior competitive quality and unparalleled value. Briscoe provides factory-trained technicians with NICET certification, in-service training, software support, preventative maintenance inspections, computerized equipment, engineering and drafting, code compliance and more. Briscoe has locations in Long Island, 5 Boroughs and Westchester, New York.