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Carbon monoxide causes closure

Terry Organ
Miner Staff Reporter

Two of four buildings comprising the El Trovatore Motel have been closed following an incident Monday that led to two tenants being hospitalized with carbon monoxide poisoning.

"My boyfriend and I stumbled upon a lady lying on the ground and we called 911," tenant Kimberly Wall said Tuesday. "She was taken to the hospital, where she was found to have high levels of carbon monoxide."

Keith Eaton, fire prevention specialist with the Kingman Fire Department, said department personnel responded to a call about a disoriented fall victim shortly before 8:30 a.m. Monday. She was taken to Kingman Regional Medical Center.

"About 10:45 a.m., an emergency room doctor contacted our Station 2 and wanted us to respond back to the motel," Eaton said Wednesday. "He said the woman had carbon monoxide poisoning and her husband was still there."

"We arrived back on the scene about 10:49 and contacted the husband, who was not complaining of any problems. We talked him into taking an ambulance ride to KRMC, where he later was admitted. The lady was flown to University Medical Center (in Las Vegas) as a precautionary measure and admitted there."

Eaton could not release the names of the husband and wife due to confidentiality laws, nor would a KRMC spokesperson.

A call placed to a spokesperson at UMC for information on the woman's condition was not returned.

Teri Williams, assistant public relations director at KRMC, initially told the Miner on Tuesday that the woman was transferred to another hospital in fair condition and that one other person was treated and released from the emergency room.

However, Wall said both she and her boyfriend, James Phelps, went to the emergency room, where they were treated for carbon monoxide exposure and released.

Williams was re-contacted Wednesday regarding the discrepancy on the number of people treated for CO poisoning and their outcomes. She said she would need names to look up specific people and names were not available.

David Hatrick, building official with the city of Kingman, said a city inspector also went to the motel.

"The fire department told motel management to either shut off gas appliances immediately or re-locate people to other buildings," Hatrick said. "It was a fire department decision. We were there for backup in case more than fire codes needed to be addressed."

Eaton confirmed the two options given to motel owner Sam Fisher, who responded to the location. He chose re-location of nine residents from six affected apartments in the two buildings.

The apartment occupied by the couple had carbon monoxide levels to 35 parts per million, a level at which firefighters entering must wear self-contained breathing apparatus, Eaton said. A level of 10 ppm is considered acceptable.

"We found the CO level of the adjacent apartment to be 80-110 ppm," Eaton said. "A level of 35 can create long-term health problems if someone is exposed for a long period of time."

"Other apartments did not show high CO levels, and those tenants were allowed to stay."

Rooms are equipped with smoke detectors but not CO detectors. CO detectors are not required by fire codes, Eaton said.



The El Trovatore Motel shown here Tuesday was partially closed on Monday following two tenants being hospitalized for carbon monoxide poisoning. JC AMBERLYN/Miner

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Ask The Editors

Kingman Daily Miner
Editors
3015 Stockton Hill Road
(928) 753-6397

Q: *Any information about who replaces Will Humble as Director Of the AZDHS?
A: Not yet, at least not that I've seen.

Q: *How can I talk to Ryan Abella as this is the first time I have used this Q andA page?
A: Call our offices and ask to speak to him. Our number is (928) 753-6397.

Fisher had given all tenants electric heaters. However, some tried to supplement by turning on gas stoves and ovens overnight without proper ventilation.

The affected couple had gas appliances operating Monday night and CO leaked over into the room occupied by Wall and Phelps, Wall said.

Wall and Phelps stayed with an acquaintance Monday and Tuesday nights. She said Fisher gave those affected \$200 to re-locate but would not refund \$720 in rent paid that entitled her to stay in her apartment until mid-January.

Fisher said he refunded \$3,300 in rent to tenants paid in advance. Wall and Phelps had not paid to stay into mid-January.

Wall produced a six-month lease agreement covering the period Oct. 18, 2007 until April 18, 2008. It stipulates rent to be paid is \$720 per month.

She also showed a receipt signed by the motel's on-site manager on Dec. 8 in the amount of \$260. It states it covers lodging for Dec. 18 to Jan. 18.

Wall said it was the balance due on rent for 30 days. She could not find the other receipt for the remaining \$460 already paid amid the chaos of Monday.

"That receipt was for payment of back rent owed," Fisher said. The dates put on the receipt were in error.

"She has always been behind in rent, but we let her slide a bit."

Wall added since she has resided at the motel, there is an on-going problem with cockroaches and mold.

"I've made several complaints to management about the problems," Wall said. "In another apartment, the whole bedroom wall is covered with mold, and management's idea of repair was to paint over it. They don't seem to care."

Fisher said the motel was well known as a haven for drug addicts when he bought it two years ago. In that time, he spent \$290,000 upgrading rooms with new paint, carpeting and other features.

Wall's complaints were not made in writing to management, Fisher said.

"I have a contract with a pest control company to come in twice a month and spray the rooms," Fisher said. "Mold problems also have been dealt with."

"If a tenant is dissatisfied, he or she just needs to put it in writing to the motel manager and it will be taken care of."

Fisher said he did all he could to assist residents displaced from the two affected buildings by moving them into other buildings that are deemed safe or in finding other accommodations.

The motel had 14 tenants on Monday, five of whom were in front buildings not affected by the carbon monoxide problem.

Fisher said he is considering whether to replace gas heaters in the two buildings closed or replace them with electric heat and air conditioning. That decision is expected to come in about three weeks, after he talks with potential contractors about costs.

"The building department is working with (Fisher) on a courtesy permit to replace the heating units," Eaton said. "We can monitor new heater installation and proper testing (before units are fully activated)."

A KFD news release states CO alarms are not a substitute for smoke detectors and people should know the difference in the sounds emitted by the two. CO alarms should be tested monthly and batteries in them replaced as necessary.

A gas oven or range top should never be used for heating, the release states. A fire could start and poisonous CO fumes could fill a home.

Any fuel-burning heating equipment (fireplaces, furnaces, water heaters, space or portable heaters), generators and chimneys can produce carbon monoxide.

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