

Beware the “Orphaned” Water Heater

In the past, older furnaces, boilers, and water heaters would frequently share the same chimney to exhaust flue gasses. Today’s high-efficiency boilers and furnaces bypass the old chimney and are vented through separate PVC piping.

If the old “atmospherically-vented” gas water heater is not replaced with a high-efficiency “direct-vented” unit when the furnace/boiler is upgraded, the water heater venting can become “orphaned” and lead to a potentially dangerous carbon monoxide hazard. Under some circumstances, the old chimney may not adequately exhaust the water heater’s combustion products, resulting in spillage back into the home.

What to do –

The best way to avoid potential problems with an orphaned water heater is to upgrade your water heater when you replace the boiler or furnace. This provides energy efficiency while improving indoor air quality.

- When replacing a boiler, the most energy-efficient water heating option is an indirect tank and coil, also called a “sidearm” (displayed in this building).
- If you decide to retain the existing water heater, the chimney flue may need to be outfitted with a smaller-diameter liner. A “worst case” spillage test (part of an energy audit) should be done on the existing water heater to determine if it can safely be vented via the existing chimney.

