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HALFMOON -- Debra Burns couldn't sleep. It was about 1:30 a.m., and she felt faint and sick. She also had a headache but didn't know why.

"I thought I coming down with something," the 50-year-old said Sunday from the Westchester Medical Center where she and four others from her home were being treated for carbon monoxide poisoning.

Officials said the level of carbon monoxide was so high in their Route 236 home that they could have died.

"They're very lucky. They could have slept right through and never woke up," said Dawn Salka, nurse manager of the hyperbaric medicine unit at Westchester Medical Center.

Burns, her husband John, 49, their grandchildren, Michael Minahan, 9, Johnna Minahan, 6, and family friend Greg Bombard, 27, were all overcome by the odorless gas. All were expected to recover and be released today after undergoing a series of oxygen treatments designed to cleanse the blood of the poison, she said.

Carbon monoxide is the No. 1 cause of poisoning in the United States with more than 2,000 deaths and 10,000 injuries reported, according to experts. It is produced by the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels such as gas, oil and coal. Faulty furnaces often are to blame.

The danger of the gas is that it is tasteless, odorless and colorless and victims often don't realize something is wrong until it is too late, Salka said.

Poisoning victims are given pure oxygen by first responders, but more long-term treatment -- in a pressurized oxygen chamber -- is needed to purge the body of the poison that settled into the body's fatty tissues and cells, Salka added.

In general, three treatments of two hours each are needed to help

someone fully recover, she said. Hyperbaric chambers are used to put extra oxygen into a victim's bloodstream.

Nine-year-old Michael Minahan said he felt like he'd been hit in the head with "a cow or a horse."

He said he was upstairs in his grandparents' bedroom watching cartoons when his grandfather was awakened by his ill grandmother, who had been sleeping downstairs.

"He got dressed and went to see about my grandma and that's when he found out something was wrong and ran upstairs to shut the TV off and get everybody outside," said the fourth-grader at Martin Van Buren Elementary School in Valatie. He said to tell his teacher, Judy Ooms, that he was OK.

Halfmoon Fire Chief John Cooper said his department was called to the house shortly after 7:30 a.m.

"One or two people woke up and felt dizzy and sick and decided to call us," Cooper said.

Firefighters donned protective gear and wore breathing equipment to get into the house. "Even on the porch they were getting high readings," Cooper said. "On the first floor, we got a reading of 300 parts per million and down in the basement, it was over 500 ppm," he continued.

A reading of 35 ppm is considered dangerous, he said.

The home had smoke detectors but did not have those that give warnings for elevated carbon monoxide levels.

Although Debra Burns had awakened during the morning hours, she said it was not until several hours later that she was able to alert her husband. That's because when she tried to get up to get some ginger ale, she stumbled into a coffee table, breaking a finger, and passed out.

"When I woke up again I was on the floor and I got up and went to get my husband ... but I felt like I was going to faint again. Neither one of us knew at that point what was going on," she said.

She said it was at that point that John Burns checked the furnace and realized that something was wrong. He then got everyone out of the house immediately and called for help, she said.

The town's code enforcement officer was called to the scene, as was Niagara Mohawk. Cooper said there was no problem with the chimney.

Late in the day, a note stuck on the front door read: "Mr. Burns. Nimo suspects your furnace is dirty at the burner. Prior to turning on needs service."

The family was taken to Ellis Hospital in Schenectady, then by helicopter to the Westchester Medical Center.

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