



PRESS RELEASE

Family Sues Navien, Inc. and Carr Supply Co. Over Carbon Monoxide Deaths Linked to Tankless Water Heater

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Columbus, OH. (September 8, 2020) - Bereaved family members have filed [a product liability lawsuit](#) against Navien, Inc. and Carr Supply Co. stemming from the May 2, 2019 discovery of the bodies of Richard Gabriel III (50), Jennifer (49), Richard Gabriel IV (15), and Grace (13) Reitter in their Genoa Township home, just north of Columbus.

Investigation revealed that the Reitters died due to carbon monoxide poisoning. The source of the carbon monoxide was traced back to a Navien NPE-240A tankless water heater, sold to Mr. Reitter by Carr Supply Co. in December 2018.

The lawsuit alleges that Navien water heaters should only be sold to and installed by Navien-certified plumbers or installers. Yet apparently anyone can buy and install one. For example, Mr. Reitter was neither Navien-certified nor licensed as a plumber or HVAC technician, and yet he was able to purchase the unit from Carr Supply. The Reitter family contends that it is not safe to allow an ordinary consumer to install one of these Navien units, even though Navien's own box reads, "One Person Installation."

The lawsuit also alleges that, when Mr. Reitter ordered the water heater from Carr Supply

Co., he specifically requested a unit for use with propane gas. Mr. Reitter thought the unit was propane-ready, and nothing on the Navien box or contents led him to think otherwise. Among other things, Navien buried the gas conversion kit and conversion guide within the unit itself (where consumers may not even look, nor were instructed to look). Because of this, Mr. Reitter remained convinced that the unit was ready for use with propane gas when he and a friend installed it on or around December 15, 2018.

Finally, the lawsuit alleges that the exhaust pipe on the Navien unit was poorly designed. For example, Navien failed to provide any instruction whatsoever regarding the depth of insertion of the exhaust pipe or the amount of force required to fully seat the pipe within the vent collar. A novice installer (like Mr. Reitter) meets resistance at an internal rubber gasket when inserting the exhaust pipe, leading him or her to mistakenly think that the pipe is fully seated. The lawsuit alleges that Navien is well aware of this problem.

What resulted was a catastrophe: 1) the water heater was not converted from factory-configured natural gas to propane (allowing the unit to produce excessive amounts of carbon monoxide); and 2) the exhaust pipe was not fully seated in the vent collar. When the exhaust pipe became dislodged, fatal amounts of carbon monoxide filled the Reitter home, killing the four members of the Reitter family and their beloved dogs.

The Reitter family tragedy comes on the heels of a similar incident in Suffolk County, New York. On February 21, 2019, 55-year-old Stephen Yancofski died following exposure to toxic levels of carbon monoxide in his home. The carbon monoxide originated from a Navien NPE-240A tankless water heater from which the exhaust pipe had become detached. A conversion issue is also involved in this case. Mr. Yancofski's wife, Kyriaki Bouziotas, then 59, was also exposed to the carbon monoxide, but survived.

Then, on May 5, 2019, a Marion, Ohio couple narrowly escaped a similarly tragic outcome. First responders came to the couple's aid and traced the source of their complaints to high levels of carbon monoxide originating from a Navien tankless water heater (also purchased from Carr Supply Co.). Genoa Township investigators noted that, in the Marion County incident, the water heater's exhaust pipe "was dislodged in what seems to be the exact location and manner" as the unit in the Reitter incident.



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L A W F I R M

Navien products have been at the center of two prior recalls related to a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. In 2011, [Navien recalled a series of tankless water heaters](#) because “[a]n unstable connection can cause the water heater's vent collar to separate or detach if pressure is applied. A detached vent collar poses a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning to the consumer.” In 2012, [Navien recalled a series of tankless water heaters and boilers](#) because “[a] kit installed on the tankless water heaters and boilers to convert them from natural gas to propane can cause the unit to produce excessive amounts of carbon monoxide, posing a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning to consumers.”

According to public record of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Navien has yet to issue a recall of the water heater model involved in the Reitter tragedy.