

**The Washington Merry-Go-Round****Gas Industry Stalls on Fuel Saver****By Jack Anderson**

A device that would cut the homeowners' gas bills by 20 to 30 per cent has been kept off the market by the American Gas Association.

The fuel saver, known as Vent-O-Matic, is an automatic damper which can be attached in the flue of a gas furnace. It has been approved by the Canadian Gas Association, which tested the device and found it safe.

But the AGA, after four years of stalling, hasn't even started the testing. As a practical matter, no gas furnace fixture can be marketed and installed until it has been tested and approved by the AGA, because contractors won't use it.

The AGA, of course, is formed by the gas industry which would like to increase, not decrease, the homeowners' gas bills. The association was hardly enthusiastic, therefore, about the Vent-O-Matic fuel saver when it was submitted for testing back in 1968.

Routine tests were run on three basic types of furnaces. The damper was found to be safe, and the proper certificates were issued. But AGA withheld general approval on the ground that no specific

standards existed for the Vent-O-Matic device, and offered to test it on any furnace submitted. But the purchase price of all types of furnaces in use would have cost several million dollars. The manufacturer asked that standards be drawn up instead.

The matter was turned over to AGA's approval committee, known as Z21. Finally, in 1971, the committee got around to authorizing a task force to test the Vent-O-Matic damper and write the standards. But a year later, no task force had been established. Last April, the Z21 committee re-authorized the task force. But still nothing has happened.

The AGA claims it can't get anyone to chair the task force. But the association refused to tell us who had turned down the chairmanship and how many people had been approached. My reporter, Ken Fisher, could locate only two people who had been offered the job. One was a California gas company official who said he declined because his company couldn't benefit from the device. The other, a Boston fire protection official, said he lacked the expertise.

After spending weeks talking to dozens of people familiar with the facts, we have

concluded that the AGA is deliberately stalling. An AGA spokesman explained that it takes time to test a new device to make sure it is safe. But the AGA hasn't even set up a committee to begin the tests.

Homeowners, meanwhile, continue to pay for gas that the device could save.

**Washington Whirl**

**Nixon Celebration**—So confident is the White House of victory in November that top aides have been asked to keep a Christmas date free for a gala victory celebration with President Nixon at San Clemente, Calif. The President's confidence has not been shaken by the Watergate affair, Soviet wheat deal, ITT case and other scandals. He told visitors privately that he was distressed over the scandals but didn't think they would hurt him on election day. They were too complicated, he said, for the public to understand. He also said that the public memory on government scandals was short. He suggested that the voters have already forgotten, for example, what the ITT scandal was all about.