

News



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 18, 2010

Connecticut Department of Public Health

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Department of Public Health Warns of Dangers of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning During Power Outages

Generators Should Be Used With Caution in the Event of Power Outages

Hartford – In anticipation for the possibility of icing and power outages from today's storm, the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is warning residents of the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) associated with alternate power sources, such as gasoline-powered generators, in the event of power outages.

"Carbon monoxide poisoning is a very real danger when using gasoline-powered generators," stated DPH Commissioner Dr. J. Robert Galvin. "It's very important that residents take precautions and properly use gasoline-powered generators and other combustion devices, like stoves and fireplaces, to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning."

The number of deaths from CO poisoning has been rising every year. Between 1996-2006, 334 people died nationally from generator-related CO poisonings, many after major storms knocked out power.

Exhaust from portable generators contains carbon monoxide and generators should never be used indoors or in enclosed spaces such as garages, basements, or porches. Always run the generator outdoors as far from the house as possible, away from doors, windows, and air intake vents. In addition, CO detectors should be installed in homes, especially near sleeping areas.

"Proper placement of the generator is critical," said Commissioner Galvin. "A generator located in any enclosed space can kill you. While generators can be very useful during a power outage, it is important that people are aware of how dangerous these generators can be and the proper ways to use them."

In addition, a licensed electrician should properly wire and connect home-use generators. You may also need a town permit or official inspection for the generator. Before using a portable generator, you must disconnect your home's electric wiring from the power grid. Otherwise, power from the generator can go out over the utility lines, endangering the lives of workers making repairs.

CO is an invisible, odorless gas that can be fatal. The symptoms of CO poisoning mimic those of the flu, including headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, or loss of consciousness. If several members of a household experience these symptoms when they are home, but feel better when they are away from the home, there may be a CO problem.

Every home in which a portable generator is operating, or that burns oil, natural gas, wood or coal, should have a carbon monoxide detector that is in good, working order. If the alarm goes off, get

out of the house immediately. Call 911 or the town fire department from a cellular phone or neighbor's house.

DPH offers safety tips to prevent CO poisoning when using gasoline generators and other gasoline-powered equipment.

Safety Tips to Prevent CO Poisoning

- Never use portable generators, pressure washer engines, or other gasoline-powered equipment (including tools) inside your home, garage, carport, basement or other enclosed spaces.
 - Place gasoline-powered equipment outside and away from doors, windows or air intake vents.
 - Install a CO detector on each floor of your residence near sleeping areas. An Underwriters Laboratory (UL) certified plug-in detector with battery-backup and a digital readout is recommended. Test alarms monthly. Change the battery at least twice a year. Replace alarms every 5 years because the sensors degrade over time.
 - Use grilling apparatus such as charcoal or gas grills outdoors only.
- **Opening windows and doors, and operating fans is not sufficient to prevent buildup of CO in a home.
- Get out of the house and seek medical help immediately if you or a family member has symptoms of CO poisoning. Symptoms include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, and loss of consciousness.
 - Call **911** from a cellular phone or neighbor's home and the Connecticut Poison Control Center at the University of Connecticut Health Center (**1-800-222-1222**).

For more information on carbon monoxide poisoning and prevention:

- DPH Environmental & Occupational Health Assessment Program
www.ct.gov/dph/co
860-509-7742
- DPH Carbon Monoxide Hazards During Power Outages
http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/environmental_health/eoha/pdf/co_disasters.pdf
- Consumer Product Safety Commission
www.cpsc.gov

For more information on carbon monoxide detectors:

- Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.
www.ul.com

The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state's leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the Department, please visit its website at www.ct.gov/dph or call (860) 509-7270.

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