



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Be alert to health and safety after devastating tornadoes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Widespread damage and power outages from the devastating tornadoes affecting Alabama raise a variety of health and safety concerns. According to the Alabama Department of Public Health, several precautions are frequently needed after natural disasters. These include recommendations about food safety, chain saw safety, carbon monoxide, and power line safety.

Food safety

Power outages raise concerns about the safety of frozen and refrigerated foods. As a general rule, a full upright or chest freezer will keep food frozen for about two days without power while a partially full freezer will keep foods frozen for about one day. Frequently opening the freezer door will shorten these times. Any thawed foods that have been at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded. Foods that have thawed to refrigerator temperatures (that is, no more than 40 degrees F) can be cooked and then refrozen.

Chain saw safety

People using a chain saw should know how to operate it. Follow these safeguards:

- Choose the proper size saw to match the job.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg wear (chain saw chaps) that extends from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until they are verified as being dead.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure secure control over the saw.
- Bystanders or coworkers should remain at least two tree lengths (minimum 150 feet) away from a tree being felled and at least 30 feet from anyone using a chain saw to remove limbs or cut up a fallen tree.
- Beware of injury from the release of bent trees or branches.

Carbon monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, toxic gas that is produced by fuel-burning appliances and automobiles. After power is lost, many people use items that could produce carbon monoxide. Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms and ultimately lead to coma and death.

Camping stoves, portable propane gas stoves and charcoal grills should not be used in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. Do not use gasoline-powered generators in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, or in areas where exhaust can vent into houses through garage doors,

windows, or air-intake vents. A generator should be placed as far away from the home as possible. Never hook up the generator to wiring installed in a home because this can create backfeed in electrical wires which could injure or kill utility workers repairing electrical lines.

Power line hazards and cars

If a power line falls on a car, do not get out of the vehicle. Warn people not to touch the car or the line. Anyone standing on the ground should not try to help a person in a car. As in all power line-related emergencies, call or ask someone to call 911 for immediate help or call the electric utility company's service center/dispatch office.