

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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NEWS RELEASE

Be aware of carbon monoxide dangers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, toxic gas that is produced by all fossil fuel burning appliances and automobiles. Exposure to carbon monoxide is responsible for more fatal unintentional poisonings in the United States than any other agent.

In the aftermath of Hurricane _____, many people may use items that could produce carbon monoxide. Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms and ultimately lead to coma and death.

All homes should have a working carbon monoxide detector.

Risks Associated with the Operation of Motor Vehicles

The carbon monoxide in motor vehicle exhaust accounts for the most poisoning deaths in the United States caused by a single agent. Most motor-vehicle deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning occur in the northern states in the colder months.

Many motor-vehicle related carbon monoxide deaths in garages have occurred even though the garage doors or windows have been open. This suggests that passive ventilation is not adequate to reduce risk in semi-enclosed spaces.

Deaths have also occurred in living or working quarters adjacent to garages with running motor vehicles in them.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can also occur inside of a car when the tailpipe of an idling automobile is obstructed by snow or other material.

Increased alcohol consumption is related to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning from motor vehicles.

Dangers are associated with using motor vehicles to keep warm. Follow these precautions:

- 1) Never run an automobile engine, lawn-mower, or any combustion engine in an enclosed area under any circumstances,
- 2) Never operate motor vehicles in semi-enclosed areas, or areas where CO can vent into residential dwellings,
- 3) Inspect the tailpipe of automobiles for signs of obstruction or damage prior to operating a motor vehicle,

Risks Associated with the Use of Fuel-Burning Appliances in Enclosed or Semi-Enclosed Areas

Further risks are posed with the use of camping stoves, portable propane gas stoves and charcoal grills in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur from cooking with charcoal briquettes in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can result from the use of butane and kerosene space heaters and wood burning stoves in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.

Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur from the operation of gasoline-powered generators in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, or in areas where exhaust from generators can vent into houses through garage doors, windows, or air-intake vents.

If a generator is used, be sure to follow these safety tips:

- Have a carbon monoxide monitor with fresh batteries in it and put place it in the house high on the wall. Carbon monoxide is lighter than air and rises towards the ceiling.
- Place generators as far away from the home as possible. People have had carbon monoxide poisoning from generators as far away as 30 feet away from the house.
- If using the generator to power a window air conditioner, put the generator as far away as possible from that window, preferably on the other side of the house.
- Never hook up the generator to the home's normal wiring. Improper wiring of a home generator can create backfeed in the electrical wires to the house and could injure or kill utility workers repairing the electrical lines.

For more information on injury prevention, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at www.adph.org.

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