

# ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## *NEWS RELEASE*

Follow hurricane safety precautions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health recommends all families in affected areas take health and safety precautions in connection with Hurricane \_\_\_\_\_. State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson urges Alabamians to listen and follow all health and safety warnings communicated through the news media.

### **Food Safety**

Power outages associated with a hurricane can cause concerns about the safety of frozen and refrigerated foods. The Alabama Department of Public Health advises that as a general rule, a full upright or chest freezer will keep foods frozen for about two days without power.

A partially full freezer will keep foods frozen for about one day. This time may be extended by keeping the door shut. A refrigerator will keep foods cool for four to six hours if the door is kept shut as much as possible.

Any thawed foods that have been at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded. Foods still containing ice crystals can be refrozen, although the quality of the food may decrease. Foods that have thawed to refrigerator temperatures (that is, no more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit) can also be cooked and then refrozen.

### **Carbon Monoxide**

The public should never use generators, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside a home, basement, garage or camper—or even outside near an open window.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if breathed. When power outages occur during emergencies such as hurricanes, people often try to use alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling or cooking. CO from these sources can build up in a home, garage or camper and poison the people and animals inside. Look to friends or a community shelter for help. If you must use an alternative source of fuel or electricity, be sure to use it only outside and away from open windows.

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.

Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause loss of consciousness and death. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever having symptoms. Consult a health care professional right away if suspect symptoms occur.

**Important Tips:**

- Never use a gas range or oven to heat a home.
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent or camper.

- Never run a generator, pressure washer or any gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented. Keep vents and flues free of debris, especially if winds are high. Flying debris can block ventilation lines.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window or door where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a closed garage.

## **Animals**

Stray animals can pose a danger during a hurricane. Most animals are disoriented and displaced, so do not corner an animal. If an animal must be removed, contact your local animal control authorities.

Certain animals may carry rabies; therefore, care should be taken to avoid contact with stray animals. If you are bitten by an animal seek immediate medical attention as soon as possible.

## **Injury Prevention**

The public should follow these safeguards against injury while using a chain saw:

- Operate, adjust and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions provided in the manual accompanying the chain saw.
- Properly sharpen chain saw blades and properly lubricate the blade with bar and chain oil. Additionally, the operator should periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade to ensure good cutting action.
- Choose the proper size of chain saw to match the job, and include safety features such as a chain brake, front and rear hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester.

- Wear the appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg wear (chain saw chaps) that extend from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until the lines are verified as being de-energized.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure that you maintain secure control over the chain saw.
- Bystanders or coworkers should remain at least two tree lengths (at least 150 feet) away from anyone felling a tree and at least 30 feet from anyone operating a chain saw to remove limbs or cut a fallen tree.
- If injury occurs, apply direct pressure over site(s) of heavy bleeding; this act may save lives.

The Alabama Department of Public Health also recommends that the public use the following guidelines when coming in contact with downed power lines:

If power lines are lying on the ground or dangling near the ground, do not touch the lines. Notify your utility company as soon as possible that lines have been damaged, or that the power lines are down, but do not attempt to move or repair the power lines.

Avoid driving through standing water if downed power lines are in the water. If a power line falls across your car while you are driving, continue to drive away from the line. If the engine stalls, do not turn off the ignition. Stay in your car and wait for emergency personnel. Do not allow anyone other than emergency personnel to approach your vehicle.

For more information on hurricane safety, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health's Web site at [www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org).