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Frequently Asked Questions

Carbon Monoxide

The Risks of Alternative Heating and Cooking Methods When the Power Is Out

Ohioans should use caution when using alternative sources of power during an outage. A single gas-powered generator can produce as much as 100 times more poisonous Carbon Monoxide gas than a car's exhaust according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide, or CO, is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death.

Where is CO found?

CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, and gas ranges and heating systems. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned by breathing it.

What are the symptoms of CO poisoning?

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO inhalation can cause loss of consciousness and death. Unless suspected, CO poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms mimic other illnesses. People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.

How can I heat my house safely or cook when the power is out?

- Never use a generator inside your home, basement or garage.
- Operate generators outdoors as far away from your house as possible. The National Institute of Standards and Technology reports that even 15 feet away may still be dangerous because the CO fumes can enter the home through windows, doors or vents. Tests are still being conducted to find a safe operating distance.
- Never refuel a generator while it is running or hot.
- Install CO detectors inside the home near all the sleeping areas.
- Never use a gas range or oven for heating. Using a gas range or oven for heating can cause a build up of CO inside your home, cabin, or camper.
- Never use a charcoal grill or a barbecue grill indoors. Using a grill indoors will cause a build up of CO inside your home, cabin, or camper unless you use it inside a vented fireplace.
- Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal — red, gray, black, or white — gives off CO.
- Never use a portable gas camp stove indoors. Using a gas camp stove indoors can cause CO to build up inside your home, cabin, or camper.

Additional Resources:

You Can Prevent Carbon Monoxide Exposure (document available in 16 languages)

<http://www.cdc.gov/co/guidelines.htm>

The Quiet Killer (video). Source: National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH)

<http://www.cdc.gov/CDCTV/QuietKiller/index.html>

How Close is Too Close for Portable Generators? Source: National Institute of Standards and Technology

<http://www.youtube.com/user/usnistgov#p/f/13/jkO9PK4JvJI>