

WINTER WEATHER AWARENESS

As the temperatures drop and the snow starts to fall, people are shutting their windows, turning off the air conditioning, and starting up the heaters in their homes. This is the time to be aware of a dangerous, yet commonplace gas – carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless gas given off by fuel-burning appliances such as gas heaters and gasoline-burning engines. CO can become deadly when these types of appliances are used indoors or without adequate ventilation. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about 500 Americans die every year from CO poisoning not related to a house fire, and more than 15,000 are injured.

Deaths and injuries peak in midwinter when heater use is highest and houses are tightly closed, or when weather emergencies shut off the power and cause people to break out their gas-burning generators. Up to half of the incidents of non-fatal carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning reported in the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons involved generators run within 7 feet of the home, according to the CDC. Researchers at the National Institute of Standards and Technology are revisiting the guidelines for how far to place a gas-burning generator from the house. The most recent studies show that people are risking dangerous levels of CO entering their homes if the generator is any closer than 25 feet. Add in the Wyoming wind that can push CO through air vents and door and window seals, and the proper placement of a gas-powered generator becomes critical.

Symptoms of CO poisoning include headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, and confusion, and, because they resemble symptoms of other illnesses, people often do not realize they are being poisoned by carbon monoxide until it is too late.

In order to protect yourself against CO poisoning, you should have your gas heating system inspected every season. Don't heat your house with a gas oven. Don't use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, garage or near a window. When using these CO-producers outside, keep them away from windows and intake vents, which can spread CO throughout the house.

Because CO is hard to detect, the best way to protect yourself from CO exposure is to

buy a CO detector. They look like smoke detectors and will sound an alarm if CO levels get too high. Educate your family to leave the house and call 9-1-1 if the alarm ever sounds. Being aware and prepared will help your family have a warm, safe and happy winter.

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