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Health officials warn of carbon monoxide danger from gas generators and alternative heating fuels

Public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services warn that using alternative fuel sources for heating or electricity during power outages can lead to a build-up of carbon monoxide which can poison people and animals.

It is not safe to burn such fuels as kerosene, propane, diesel or charcoal inside a house or any enclosed area. If you use a gas generator for back-up electricity, locate it away from the house and other enclosed spaces to avoid toxic fumes entering the home.

Barbecues, hibachi stoves, lanterns and camp stoves can produce colorless, odorless and lethal carbon monoxide gas.

People who breathe too much of the gas can be poisoned. Red blood cells pick up carbon monoxide faster and hang on to it tighter than they do oxygen. Thus, red blood cells are unable to carry oxygen to the tissues in the body leading to tissue damage and death.

Health officials advise:

- If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, seek medical attention immediately;
- Every home should have at least one carbon monoxide detector. Be sure to check batteries at least twice a year;
- Never run a generator or any gasoline powered device inside the home, garage, or basement, and never where exhaust can be vented into an enclosed space;

- Never use any kind of gasoline, kerosene, propane, natural gas or charcoal burning device inside your home or garage. Never use gas lanterns, hibachis, grills, camp stoves inside homes, campers, or other enclosed spaces;
- Do not run a car or truck inside an attached garage, even if the door is open;
- Never burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't vented to the outside;
- Never heat your house with a gas oven.

The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. However, people who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from poisoning before ever having symptoms.

Health officials say that two people in Oregon died of apparent carbon monoxide poisoning during the December snow storm.

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