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## Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency

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**Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled.**

When power outages occur during emergencies such as hurricanes or winter storms, the use of alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, or cooking can cause CO to build up in a home, garage, or camper and to poison the people and animals inside.

**Every year, more than 500 people die in the U. S. from accidental CO poisoning.**

CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, lanterns, and gas ranges, or by burning charcoal and wood. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned and can die from breathing CO.

### How to Recognize CO Poisoning

Exposure to CO 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.

### Important CO Poisoning Prevention 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, door, or vent 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 garage.
- If conditions are too hot or too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter.

- If CO poisoning is suspected, consult a health care professional right away.

## Educational materials

- Flyers and door hangers <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/co-materials.asp>
- Public Service Announcements <http://www.cdc.gov/co/psa.htm>
- CO Poisoning Prevention Guidelines <http://www.cdc.gov/co/guidelines.htm>  
(Available in 17 languages)
- Clinical Guidance for Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning After a Disaster [New Sep 19, 2008](#)

## You Can Prevent Carbon Monoxide Exposure

**Do** have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.

**Do** install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. If the detector sounds leave your home immediately and call 911.

**Do** seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseous.

**Don't** use a generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window.

**Don't** run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open.

**Don't** burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't vented.

**Don't** heat your house with a gas oven.

If you plan to use a fireplace or wood stove for emergency heating, have your chimney or flue inspected each year. Also, install a smoke detector and a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector near the area to be heated. Test them monthly, and replace batteries twice yearly.

All information by the Centers for Disease Control – as of 1/5/09