

Know Carbon Monoxide Dangers Before the Power Goes Out

Release #07-203

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As hurricane season blows in, consumers need to be aware of the many dangers associated with severe weather. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) urges consumers to protect themselves and their families not only during, but after the storm.

In 2005, CPSC received reports of at least 64 people who died from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning associated with portable generators.

Portable gas generators, often used by consumers to restore power to their homes and businesses in the aftermath of a storm, produce high levels of odorless, poisonous CO. CPSC warns consumers that generators should be used outdoors only, far from doors, windows, and vents that could allow CO to come indoors.

Porter Novelli "Healthstyles" surveys (Porter Novelli's 2005 and 2006 HealthStyles mail survey was conducted among approximately 10,000 adults age 18 and older using Synovate's Consumer Opinion Panel. Analyses were conducted at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under a licensing agreement with Porter Novelli) of more than 10,000 adults found dangerous misconceptions about generator safety. The surveys found that most respondents (62 percent) believe it is safe to run a generator in a garage as long as the garage door is open. Many (47 percent) also believe it is safe to run a generator in a basement as long as a window is open. But both scenarios have caused deaths.

Even in a garage with the door open, CO can accumulate rapidly and seep into the home, overpowering sleeping occupants. CPSC warns consumers never to use a generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds, or similar areas, even with ventilation. CPSC estimates the amount of CO produced by just one generator is equal to the CO produced by hundreds of idling cars.

"Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless poison gas. It is an invisible killer," said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. "While generators can come in handy after a storm, using one indoors can kill you and your family in minutes."

Deaths associated with CO from portable generators have risen in recent years. In 1999, generators were involved with 6% of the total yearly estimated CO poisoning deaths associated with all consumer products compared to 24% in 2002.

CPSC has taken major steps to alert and safeguard consumers who use portable generators. CPSC mandated that all generators manufactured or imported on or after May 14, 2007, bear a prominent DANGER label to warn consumers about CO and encourage safe use.

CPSC is also pursuing rulemaking to develop performance requirements or other strategies to lower the risk of CO poisoning associated with portable generators.

The agency has posted a new alert on its Web site,

<http://www.cpsc.gov>

with tips for consumers on safe generator use.

To see this release on CPSC's web site, including a graphic of the danger label and links to the new alert, please go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml07/07203.html>



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