

Carbon Monoxide and Generators

What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas. Several household sources, such as gasoline-powered tools and generators, produce carbon monoxide. Anything that burns can produce carbon monoxide. The fumes are extremely hazardous and can cause sudden illness or death.

Why is carbon monoxide so dangerous?

Carbon monoxide weakens the blood's ability to carry oxygen to organs and body tissues. The gas cannot be seen or smelled, so people often don't know they are breathing it. Poisoning can occur in minutes.

Why is carbon monoxide poisoning a potential problem during a disaster situation?

During disasters, people who lose electricity often turn to fuel-powered devices to cool or heat their homes or cook their food. Gas-powered generators may be used during emergencies but need to be used safely in an outdoor setting. Carbon monoxide fumes from generators can build up in enclosed areas and poison people.

Who is at risk?

Nearly everyone is at risk, but carbon monoxide is especially dangerous to infants, women who are pregnant and their unborn children, the elderly and people with heart or breathing problems. It also can affect pets.

What are the ways people get carbon monoxide poisoning?

In disaster situations, carbon monoxide poisonings usually occur from improperly operated generators. Carbon monoxide poisoning also can occur when gas stoves, lanterns, charcoal grills, gas ranges, gas dryers and hot water heaters, automobiles and heating systems are not used correctly.

What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are dizziness, drowsiness, severe headache, weakness, nausea and confusion. If you experience any of these, get out of the house and seek medical attention immediately.

What is the safest way to operate a generator during an emergency?

The most important thing to remember is location. Never use a generator inside a home or outside near an open window. Generators should be placed at least 10 feet from the home and in a well-ventilated area.

How can I keep myself and my family safe?

- Never use generators or other gasoline or charcoal-burning devices such as grills or heaters inside your home, in a garage, in an enclosed area or outside near an open window.
- Never use gas ranges or ovens to heat your home.
- Never run an automobile in an enclosed space, even in an open garage.
- Make sure all appliances are properly installed and maintained.



Should I install a carbon monoxide detector in my home?

Yes. Install detectors in your home especially near bedrooms. Check the batteries every year. Carbon monoxide detectors work similarly to smoke detectors and can be found at most hardware stores.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your local health department. Additional information on emergency preparedness can be found on the Texas Department of State Health Services Web site, www.dshs.state.tx.us, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, www.cdc.gov