Carbon Monoxide
Protecting Yourself Following an Emergency

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas. It can can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe it. This can be harmful when power outages occur during emergencies such as hurricanes or winter storms. You may try to use alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, or cooking. CO from these sources can build up in your home, garage, or camper. It can poison the people and animals inside. If you are too hot or too cold, or you need to prepare food, do not put yourself and your family at risk. Go to friends or a community shelter for help. If you must use an alternative source of fuel or electricity, use it only outside. Be sure it is away from open windows.

CAUSES

Every year, more than 500 people die from accidental CO poisoning from motor vehicles alone. CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by: small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, lanterns, and gas ranges, or 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. They can can die from breathing CO in an enclosed or partially enclosed space. Never use these devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper: generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices. Do not use them outside if they are near an open window.

SYMPTOMS

Exposure to CO can cause loss of consciousness and death. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are:

- Headache.
- Vomiting.
- Nausea.
- Dizziness.
- Chest pain.
- Weakness.
- Confusion.

People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever having symptoms. If you think you may have CO poisoning, consult a caregiver right away.

PREVENTION

Install a battery-operated CO detector in your home. Check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall. Many units include both smoke and CO detectors. It is recommended that both be installed.

Important 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 unless the equipment is installed and vented by a professional. 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 or door 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.
- Heating systems, water heaters, and other appliances fueled by gas, oil, or coal should be regularly serviced by qualified technicians.
- Do not use portable, flameless chemical (*catalytic*) heaters indoors. These heaters do not have a flame, but they burn gas. They can cause CO to build up in a home, cabin, or camper.
- If you smell an odor coming from the cooling unit of a gas refrigerator, it should be serviced by a trained

technician. An odor from the cooling unit can mean there is a defect in that unit. It could also be giving off CO.

- When purchasing gas equipment, buy only equipment carrying the seal of a national testing agency. The American Gas Association or Underwriters' Laboratories are examples of these agencies.

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