

Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning During Power Outages

Portable gasoline-powered engines that can generate power, pump water, or provide other essential services during a power outage produce significant amounts of carbon monoxide. To use these machines safely and prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, one must always be careful in the placement of these gas-fueled machines.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It can become a silent killer very quickly. A single portable 5.5 kW generator can put out the same amount of carbon monoxide equivalent to six idling cars.¹

Safety Tips for Using Generators During Power Outages:

- Portable gas-powered equipment must be kept out of enclosed spaces to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Do not use other gasoline-powered equipment, including pressure washers and saws, inside buildings or other partially enclosed spaces, including garages, even if the garage door is open.
- Keep portable gas-powered equipment away from open windows, doors, vents, air intakes, and air conditioner units.
- Do not use generators in garages or other partially enclosed spaces, even if the door is open.
- Beware of electrocution hazards with portable generators and keep equipment dry. Use only heavy gauge, grounded extension cords.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions when using any piece of equipment.
- Use portable battery-operated carbon monoxide detectors in areas of your home or enclosed work place where you may be using gasoline-powered equipment.
- Install carbon monoxide battery operated or plug-in alarms with battery back-up near each bedroom/sleeping area of your home. Test alarms frequently and replace batteries once a year, at the same time you change out batteries on smoke alarms.
- Consider possible pathways for carbon monoxide to enter buildings (i.e. windows, doors, vents, etc.). One should consider other factors when placing the equipment for operation such as wind direction, proximity to occupied enclosures, etc.

Health Effects:

Carbon monoxide can cause headaches, nausea, weakness, dizziness, visual disturbances, and loss of consciousness within minutes of exposure.

Know the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and protect yourself, your family, and co-workers.

¹ Consumer Product Safety Commission. Memorandum to Janet Buyer from Sandra E. Inkster: Health hazard assessment of CO poisoning associated with emissions from a portable, 5.5 kilowatt, gasoline-powered generator. Washington, DC: Consumer Product Safety Commission; September 21, 2004. Available at:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/LIBRARY/FOIA/FOIA04/os/ecportgen.pdf>

