

Avoiding carbon monoxide poisoning and other cold weather hazards

When winter settles in, residents need to take precautions and be aware of cold weather hazards that can affect people and property.

Residents who lose power at home or who need extra heat should never use charcoal barbecues, propane heaters, un-vented gas heaters or gasoline powered machinery such as generators, indoors or in garages or carports. It is also not safe to use these devices too close to windows or air intakes. Doing so may release carbon monoxide, an odorless, invisible gas that can kill a person within minutes.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and fatigue. Anyone who may have carbon monoxide poisoning should leave the building and get fresh air immediately. If other people are also in the building, try to help them leave but don't put yourself at greater risk. Once outside the building, immediately call for medical help. Emergency responders will advise when it is safe to reenter the affected house.

Other precautions to take:

- Never use an oven or range -- gas or electric -- to heat your home. The flame can overheat and ignite nearby materials.
- If you use fireplaces or wood burning stoves, burn only well-seasoned wood. Don't burn trash, newspapers, cardboard boxes, building lumber, engineered woods, pressed boards, plywood, Christmas trees or similar items; they burn unevenly, may contain toxins, and increase the risk of uncontrolled fires. If you use artificial fire logs, burn just one at a time.
- Keep all people, pets, and flammable objects, including kindling, bedding, and clothing at least 36 inches away from fireplaces and wood stoves. Use screens or doors sufficient to keep embers inside the fire box.
- Keep young children away from working wood stoves and fireplaces to avoid burn injuries. Prohibit roughhousing in any room where a fireplace or wood-burning stove is operating.
- Never leave a fireplace unattended, especially while you are sleeping.
- Make sure wood stoves are properly vented.
- Having a fire extinguisher readily available and knowing how to properly use it can be an asset, if you catch the fire early. If the fire is bigger than you are, however, it's probably too big to put out with an extinguisher.
- Turn off space heaters before leaving a room or going to sleep. Supervise children and pets at all times when a portable space heater is on. Keep all flammable objects at least three feet from space heaters.

Prevention

- Stock up on batteries, flashlights, portable radios, canned foods, manual can openers, bottled water and blankets. Use flashlights for emergency lighting rather than candles.
- Install at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home and near sleeping areas. Change the batteries when you change the time on your clocks in the spring and fall.
- In addition to smoke alarms, install at least one carbon monoxide alarm to protect sleeping areas. Change the batteries when you change the time on your clocks in the spring and fall.
- Keep central heating systems in top fuel-burning efficient shape with regular professional inspections, cleanings and tune-ups. Fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, chimneys and flues should also be inspected once a year and cleaned or repaired as needed.
- Keep gas appliances properly adjusted and serviced.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>.