

Carbon Monoxide POISONING:

The “Invisible” Killer

consumer**brief**

WHAT IS CARBON MONOXIDE (CO)?

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless and odorless gas, produced by the incomplete burning of various fuels, including charcoal, wood, oil, kerosene, propane and natural gas.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that every year more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning, more than 20,000 visit hospital emergency rooms, and more than 4,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning. Death from CO poisoning is highest among Americans age 65 and older (www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm).

Equipment and machines powered by internal combustion engines and fueled by gasoline or diesel, which include portable generators, cars and lawn mowers, all produce carbon monoxide. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (C.P.S.C.) reports that on average, close to 170 people in the United States die every year due to CO poisoning from non-automotive consumer products such as:

- malfunctioning fuel-burning appliances such as furnaces, ranges, water heaters and room heaters;
- engine-powered equipment such as portable generators;
- fireplaces; and
- charcoal-based heating and cooking devices being operated in homes and other enclosed areas.

Many CO poisoning deaths can be attributed to the use of portable generators during severe weather when power outages are common.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING?

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Dizziness

High-level CO poisoning results in progressively more severe symptoms, including the following.

- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Loss of muscular coordination
- Loss of consciousness
- Ultimately death

The severity of symptoms is related to both the CO level and the duration of exposure.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING CO POISONING:

- Open all of your home's doors and windows, and immediately take everyone in the house outside into the fresh air. You should then go to a neighbor's house or use your cell phone to call the fire department.
- Go to an emergency room and tell the doctor that you suspect you may be suffering from CO poisoning.
- Return to the house *ONLY* when the source of the CO has been found and fixed.

Continued



800-242-5846 › New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov



HOW TO PREVENT CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

- Never use portable generators inside your home, including in basements, open doorways, or in garages. Place generators in outside areas, as far away from your home as possible.
- Keep idling lawn mowers, snow blowers, lawn edgers, hedge trimmers, and other landscaping equipment away from your home. **NEVER** put idling equipment in your garage.
- Never try to heat your home with a charcoal grill. Charcoal grills should **NEVER** be used indoors.
- Never use your gas oven to heat your home. Gas ovens emit carbon monoxide and are not designed to heat rooms. If you use foil on the bottom of a gas stove, be sure that it does not cover the openings which may interfere with combustion.
- Never sleep in a room with closed windows and a running and unvented gas or kerosene heater.
- Make sure appliances are installed according to the manufacturer's instructions and local building codes. Most appliances should be installed by professionals.
- Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Have your chimney inspected and cleaned every year.
- Never leave a car running in the garage even with the garage door open.
- In the winter, make sure that your car's exhaust pipe is not blocked by snow.
- **BUY, INSTALL AND MAINTAIN A CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR.**



NEW JERSEY'S LAWS ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTORS

- In April of 2003, New Jersey began to require that carbon monoxide detectors be installed in all new one- and two-family homes prior to initial occupancy, and upon sale of existing homes.
- Carbon monoxide detectors should be installed and maintained in the immediate vicinity of the sleeping area(s).
- Carbon monoxide detectors may be battery powered, plugged into electric receptacles, or hard-wired to the home's electrical system.
- Carbon monoxide detectors must meet the Underwriters Lab UL-2034 standard. Check the detector's package to make sure the UL-2034 standard is met.

To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, go online to: www.cpsc.gov, call the C.P.S.C.'s Hotline at (800) 638-2772 or teletypewriter at (301) 595-7054 for the hearing and speech impaired.

DIVISION OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

973-504-6200 ■ 800-242-5846 (toll free within New Jersey)

website: www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov

800-242-5846 › New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs
www.NJConsumerAffairs.gov

