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Panhandle Health District
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Safely Use Generators to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Panhandle Health District issues reminder after Carbon Monoxide exposure sickens several Idahoans.

HAYDEN, ID – In wake of the continued winter weather, Panhandle Health District (PHD) is reminding North Idaho residents to take precautions to prevent carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO is a poisonous gas produced by burning fuels such as gasoline, natural gas, propane, kerosene, charcoal and wood. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces, such as your home or garage.

Cases of CO poisoning increase in the winter; often related to generator use. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), CO poisoning kills more than 400 Americans and is responsible for over 50,000 emergency department visits each year. In Idaho, several individuals have recently presented to local hospitals with symptoms of CO poisoning. No deaths have been reported in Idaho this winter.

“Carbon monoxide is invisible, tasteless, and odorless, which is why taking precautions and being aware is critical,” said Dave Hylsky, PHD Staff Epidemiologist. “I urge everyone to install carbon monoxide detectors in their homes, boats, cabins, campers, and anywhere carbon monoxide might be present to protect you and your family from accidental poisoning.”

Symptoms of carbon monoxide include headache, nausea, weakness, abdominal discomfort/pain, dizziness and confusion. Children, pregnant women and individuals with heart conditions are most vulnerable to poisoning. Anyone with these symptoms and suspect CO poisoning should go outside the building immediately and seek medical attention.

5 Tips to help prevent CO poisoning:

1- Never leave a car running in a garage, even with the garage door open. Do not leave the rear window or tailgate of a vehicle open while driving. CO from the exhaust can be pulled inside the car, van, or camper;
2- Never use a gas stove or oven to heat the home. Never burn charcoal inside a house, garage, vehicle, or tent. Do not use charcoal in a fireplace;

3- Avoid using unvented gas, propane or kerosene heaters in enclosed spaces, especially sleeping areas.

4- Never use a portable generator or fuel-powered tools indoors or in enclosed or partially enclosed areas. Always place portable generators outdoors on a dry surface, at least 20 feet away from doors, windows, vents and air conditioning equipment that could allow CO to enter.

5- Install battery operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup inside a home according to manufacturer’s installation instructions.

For more information about carbon monoxide poisoning or emergencies, review the Idaho Dept. of Health and Welfare CO fact sheet or call the Idaho Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

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