

Winter storms bring carbon monoxide danger to homes

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(HealthDay)—With winter storms roaring through much of the United

States this week, millions of Americans may face power outages that could put them at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and fires as they try to keep warm, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission warns.

When the power goes out, many people use portable generators or other devices for heat and power, but improper use of such equipment can be dangerous. Here, the safety commission offers some vital tips.

Each year, more than 80 people in the United States die from [carbon monoxide \(CO\) poisoning](#) caused by portable generators, according to the CPSC.

Carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless, and poisoning from portable generators can occur quickly. People may become unconscious before they recognize the symptoms of nausea, dizziness or weakness.

If you have a portable [generator](#), operate it outside only. It should be at least 20 feet away from the house. Direct the exhaust away from the home or any other buildings that someone might enter, the safety commission advises.

Never operate a portable generator inside a home, garage, basement, crawlspace, shed or on a porch. Opening doors or windows will not provide enough ventilation to prevent the buildup of deadly [carbon monoxide](#) levels.

Portable generators need to be properly maintained, and it's crucial to read and follow the labels, instructions and warnings on the generator and in the owner's manual, the CPSC said.

Are you buying a portable generator? Get one equipped with a safety feature that shuts it off automatically when high CO concentrations are present around the generator.

You also should have carbon monoxide alarms outside separate sleeping areas and on each floor of the home. Make sure they're working properly by pressing the test button. Never ignore a CO alarm when it sounds. Get outside immediately. Then call 911.

Never use a charcoal grill in an enclosed [space](#) such as a garage, even with the door open. Doing so can produce lethal levels of CO.

If the power goes out, use flashlights instead of candles for light.

If you're using a space heater for extra warmth, [use it safely](#). Always plug it directly into a wall outlet and never into a power strip, to prevent overloading and causing a fire. Keep flammable materials at least 3 feet away from [space heaters](#).

Each year, portable heaters cause about 1,700 fires in the United States, resulting in about 80 deaths and 160 injuries, according to the CPSC. A devastating blaze that killed 17 people in New York City just last month was blamed on a space heater.

Space heaters also pose an overheating (hyperthermia) risk, especially to children, seniors and people with disabilities. Hyperthermia can result in death.

Never leave space heaters running unattended in a confined space around infants or people with reduced physical, sensory or mental capabilities, the CPSC warned.

Install smoke alarms on every level of your house and in every bedroom.

More information: For more on winter storm safety, go to the [American Red Cross](#).

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