

As blizzards bear down, stay safe from carbon monoxide dangers

January 11 2024, by Cara Murez



With blizzards and possible power outages threatening much of America

this week, some dangers might not be immediately obvious: carbon monoxide poisoning, fires and electric shock.

"I urge consumers to follow CPSC's safety tips to prepare ahead of storms to prevent loss of life in a storm's aftermath," said Alex Hoehn-Saric, chair of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Carbon monoxide (CO) from gasoline-powered portable generators can kill within minutes if used improperly. It has no color or odor, so can render a person unconscious even before they recognize the symptoms of nausea, dizziness or weakness, the CPSC warns.

This gas kills nearly 100 Americans using portable generators each year. Black individuals have a higher risk of death, accounting for 23% of those who died between 2011 and 2021, according to the CPSC.

To stay safe, the commission advises following these recommendations:

- Never operate a portable [generator](#) inside a home, garage, basement, crawl space or shed. It's not enough to open doors or windows. Lethal levels of CO can still build up.
- Use these generators outside only, at least 20 feet away from the house. Direct the exhaust away from the home and any other buildings that someone could enter.
- Keep windows and other openings closed that are in the pathway of the exhaust.
- Never use a generator on a porch or in a carport. They are too close to the house.
- Follow portable generator instructions about electrical shock hazards. These include use of an NFPA-rated non-combustible generator tent or waiting until the rain has stopped.
- Make sure portable generators are maintained properly. Read and follow the labels, instructions and warnings on the generator and

in the owner's manual.

- Choose a [portable generator](#) with a CO shut-off safety feature. This is meant to shut the generator off automatically when high levels of CO are present. These generators may be advertised as certified to the latest safety standards for portable generators—PGMA G300-2018 and UL 2201. They are estimated to reduce deaths from CO poisoning by 87% and 100%, respectively. The UL 2201 certified models have reduced CO emissions in addition to the CO shut-off feature.
- Be sure your smoke and CO alarms are working properly.
- Install battery-operated CO alarms or CO alarms with battery backup on each level and outside separate sleeping areas at home. The best alarms are interconnected.
- Install a smoke alarm on every level of the home and in each bedroom. Test these alarms monthly and replace batteries, if needed. Never ignore an [alarm](#) when it sounds. Get outside immediately. Then call 911.

The CPSC offers some additional tips for charcoal and candles. Never use charcoal indoors because that can lead lethal levels of CO to build up. Don't cook on charcoal in the garage, even with the door open.

Use flashlights or battery-operated candles rather than those with flames. If you do use them, do not burn them near anything that can catch fire and never leave them unattended. Extinguish them before leaving the room or sleeping.

Use caution if appliances may have gotten wet. Do not touch wet appliances that are still plugged into an electrical source. Have a professional or your gas or electric company evaluate appliances for safety.

Replace all gas control valves, electrical wiring, circuit breakers and

fuses that have been under water.

If you smell or hear gas leaking, leave your home immediately. Call local gas authorities from outside the home. Do not operate any electronics, including lights and your phone, before leaving.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [carbon monoxide poisoning](#).

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