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Unsafe Generator Use Can Result in Carbon Monoxide Death

Carbon monoxide detectors recommended for all homes

INDIANAPOLIS – Generators are used more than ever to combat power outages, and also have become an increasing cause of death, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

In light of recent flooding in Northwest Indiana and scattered power outages, a state official is advising caution with the use of generators.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 1999, generators were associated with 6% of the total yearly estimated carbon monoxide poisoning deaths associated with all consumer products compared to 24% in 2002.

“Improperly using a generator can cause great risk to you and the lives of loved ones,” said Mike Garvey, director of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security Fire and Building Safety Division. “Because generators are used sporadically, and in urgent situations, safety measures can be overlooked. We’re stressing safe use and are providing some guidelines.”

Garvey also is recommending carbon monoxide detectors in all homes, not just those with generators. The monitors should be placed between any items that might produce carbon monoxide and sleeping areas. Devices that produce carbon monoxide include fuel-burning furnaces, space heaters, stoves fireplaces and more.

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Generator Use

When using a generator in the home:

- Follow the supplied directions.
- Do not use indoors, even inside a garage.
- Adequately ventilate the area.
- Consult the owner's manual for refueling practices, including:
 - Allowing the generator to cool before refueling.
 - Storing fuel in an approved container.
 - Keeping fuel outside of your home, but in a protected area, such as a locked shed.
- Connect equipment directly to the generator.
- DO NOT connect a generator to a home's electrical system.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Symptoms

Carbon monoxide poisoning is sometimes confused with the flu, food poisoning or other illnesses. Early symptoms include:

- Mild headache
- Light headedness
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath

If the carbon monoxide alarm sounds and anyone is experiencing symptoms, immediately evacuate and call 911. If the alarm goes off and no one has symptoms, air out the home, turn off fuel-burning appliances and reset the carbon monoxide alarm.

If elevated levels remain, the alarm will sound again after about six minutes. If the alarm sounds again, call a qualified heating contractor for inspection. Don't use any fuel-burning appliances until they have been inspected.

In 2005, the State of Indiana consolidated all of its emergency management and homeland security efforts into one department by creating the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS). The divisions of IDHS are Emergency Response, Fire and Building Safety; the Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center; Planning and Assessment; Preparedness and Training; and Support Services. These divisions intertwine to accomplish the central mission of IDHS: safeguarding the lives and property of the citizens of Indiana.

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