



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keep Carbon Monoxide Out

Carbon Monoxide Exposures After Hurricane Ike — Texas, September 2008

Recorded: August 11, 2009; posted: August 13, 2009

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Hurricanes and other severe storms can be deadly events, but the danger doesn't always pass with the storm. After Hurricane Ike struck the coast of Texas in 2008, carbon monoxide exposure caused 13 deaths and caused at least 34 people to seek medical treatment. About 75 percent of exposures were the result of improper use of gasoline-powered generators.

Scott Damon is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Environmental Health. He's joining us today to discuss the dangers of carbon monoxide exposure. Welcome to the show, Scott.

[Mr. Damon] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Scott, how many people die from or seek medical care for carbon monoxide exposure each year in the United States?

[Mr. Damon] About 450 to 500 people die from unintentional, non-fire related carbon monoxide exposure each year in the U.S. So that excludes suicides and people dying in house fires. At least 20,000 people seek medical care.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure?

[Mr. Damon] Well, first off, you have to be aware of whether there's something in your home or wherever else you are that could produce carbon monoxide – a furnace, a generator, a vehicle. The symptoms are not very different from a lot of other things – nausea, vomiting, headache, fatigue. So you really have to know if there's some way you could be getting exposed.

[Dr. Gaynes] How quickly can a person be overcome by carbon monoxide?

[Mr. Damon] That would depend on the room you're in, how much carbon monoxide is going into the room from the generator or furnace, or something like that.

[Dr. Gaynes] Besides gasoline-powered generators, are there other common sources of carbon monoxide inside a house?

[Mr. Damon] Indeed there are. The most common source is a furnace that burns propane or coal or oil or something like that. Generators are very common in a power outage situation.

[Dr. Gaynes] Will keeping windows and doors open provide enough ventilation for a generator?

[Mr. Damon] No. In fact, you shouldn't even have the generator indoors at all. The generator should be outdoors, at least 25 feet from windows, doors, and vents.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can people protect themselves from carbon monoxide exposure?

[Mr. Damon] Most importantly, they should prevent the carbon monoxide from entering their home in the first place. To do this, they should have their furnace professionally serviced every year. They should never warm up a vehicle inside the garage, even if they have the garage door open. And they should always place a generator, when in use, 25 feet away from windows, doors, and vents. In addition, they should have a carbon monoxide detector, preferably a battery-powered one, in their home.

[Dr. Gaynes] Scott, where can listeners get more information about the dangers of carbon monoxide exposure?

[Mr. Damon] They should visit our website: www.cdc.gov/CO.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks Scott. I've been talking today with CDC's Scott Damon about the dangers of carbon monoxide exposure.

Remember, gasoline-powered machines should always be used outdoors, away from doors, windows, or vents. And purchasing a battery-powered carbon monoxide detector can help prevent serious illness or even death.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.