

# FACTSHEET

## Carbon Monoxide and Generators

### What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas. Several household sources, such as gasoline-powered tools and generators, produce carbon monoxide. Anything that burns can produce carbon monoxide. The fumes are extremely hazardous and can cause sudden illness or death.

### Why is carbon monoxide so dangerous?

Carbon monoxide weakens the blood's ability to carry oxygen to organs and body tissues. The gas cannot be seen or smelled, so people often don't know they are breathing it. Poisoning can occur in minutes.

### Why is carbon monoxide poisoning a potential problem during a disaster situation?

During disasters, people who lose electricity often turn to fuel-powered devices to cool or heat their homes or cook their food. Gas-powered portable generators may be used during emergencies but need to be used safely in an outdoor setting. Carbon monoxide fumes from generators can build up in enclosed areas and poison people.

### What is the safest way to operate a generator during an emergency?

The most important thing to remember is location. Never use a portable generator inside a home, in a garage or outside near an open window. Generators should be placed at least 10 feet from the home and in a well-ventilated area.

### Who is at risk?

Nearly everyone is at risk, but carbon monoxide is especially dangerous to infants, women who are pregnant and their unborn children, the elderly and people with heart or breathing problems. It also can affect pets.

## What are the ways people get carbon monoxide poisoning?

In disaster situations, carbon monoxide poisonings usually occur from improperly operated generators. Carbon monoxide poisoning also can occur when gas stoves, lanterns, charcoal grills, gas ranges, gas dryers and hot water heaters, automobiles and heating systems are not used correctly.

## What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are dizziness, drowsiness, severe headache, weakness, nausea and confusion. If you experience any of these, get out of the house and seek medical attention immediately.

**Poison Control Center (Houston): (713) 463-5668**