IDPH Iowa Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health

Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Overview: Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can cause illness and even death before you are aware you are being exposed to it. Improper use of gas-powered generators and other power equipment while cleaning up after a flood can increase the risk of CO poisoning.

Where is CO found?
CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, gas ranges and heating systems. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned by breathing it.

How to Recognize CO Poisoning
The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO ingestion can cause loss of consciousness and death.

What should I do if I suspect I've been exposed to CO
- If you feel sick or dizzy, go outside to fresh air immediately.
- If symptoms persist or worsen, consult a health care professional right away.
- It is especially important to contact a health care professional if anyone loses consciousness.

Important CO Poisoning Prevention Tips
- Install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- Never run a portable generator, pressure washer, or any portable gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window, door, or vent where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent, or camper.