

Department of Public Health

**December 2008**

## **Health and Emergency Response Officials Stress Public Awareness of a “Silent Killer” During Winter Weather**

### ***CO poisoning causes an average of 33 hospitalizations, 339 emergency department visits, and four deaths each year in Connecticut***

**Hartford** – The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) warned residents today about the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning associated with malfunctioning heating systems, blocked chimneys, vehicle exhaust and the improper use of portable gasoline-powered generators. They also stressed the importance of installing a CO detector to prevent accidental poisonings.

At a CO poisoning awareness event held today at the East Hartford Public Safety Complex, state and local health, and emergency response officials emphasized that lives could be saved and disability prevented if residents learned to recognize and prevent the dangers of CO poisoning. “By being aware and understanding the danger of CO poisoning, you can prevent unnecessary exposures of this deadly hazard to you and your loved ones,” stated DPH Commissioner Dr. J. Robert Galvin.

In Connecticut, there is an average of 33 hospitalizations, 339 emergency department visits, and 4 deaths from unintentional, non-fire-related CO poisonings each year. Tragically, a New Milford couple recently died from carbon monoxide after accidentally leaving their car running inside the garage.

CO is an invisible, odorless gas that can be fatal. The symptoms of CO poisoning mimic those of the flu, including headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, or loss of consciousness. Health officials warned that if several members of a household experience these symptoms when they are home, but feel better when they are away from the home, there may be a CO problem.

“Every home that burns oil, natural gas, wood or coal or uses a portable generator should have a carbon monoxide detector that is in good, working order,” stated John Oates, chief of the East Hartford Fire Department. “If the alarm goes off, get out of the house immediately. Call 911 or the town fire department from a cell phone or neighbor’s house.”

“The proper placement of the CO detector is extremely important” said Chief Oates. “Install a CO detector on each floor of your residence near sleeping areas.” He recommended using a UL certified plug-in detector with battery-backup and a digital readout. The detector should be tested monthly and the battery changed at least twice a year. Replace alarms every 5 years because the sensors degrade over time. CO detectors cost from \$25 - \$50 and can be found at most hardware stores.

Residents should have their appliances and heating systems checked annually to ensure that there is adequate ventilation and CO is not building up in their homes. The majority of CO poisonings occur between October and March, the normal heating season.

#### *Safety Tips to Prevent Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning*

- Install a CO detector near sleeping areas.
- Never use portable generators, pressure washer engines, or other gasoline-powered equipment (including tools) inside your home, garage, carport, basement or other enclosed spaces.
- Never use portable generators, pressure washer engines, or other gasoline-powered equipment (including tools) inside your home, garage, carport, basement or other enclosed spaces.
- Place gasoline-powered equipment outside and away from doors, windows or air intake vents.

- Use grilling apparatus such as charcoal or gas grills outdoors only.  
\*\*Opening windows and doors, and operating fans is not sufficient to prevent buildup of CO in a home.
- Get out of the house and seek medical help immediately if you or a family member has unexplained/sudden onset of symptoms of CO poisoning. Symptoms include headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, and loss of consciousness.
- Call **911** from a cell phone or neighbor's home and the Connecticut Poison Control Center at the University of Connecticut Health Center (**1-800-222-1222**).

For more information on CO poisoning and prevention:

- DPH Environmental & Occupational Health Assessment Program  
[www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph)  
509-7742

860-

- Connecticut Poison Control Center  
<http://poisoncontrol.uchc.edu>  
800-222-1222
- Consumer Product Safety Commission  
<http://www.cpsc.gov>

For more information on CO detectors:

- Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. [www.ul.com](http://www.ul.com)

*The Connecticut Department of Public Health is the state's leader in public health policy and advocacy with a mission to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of our state. To contact the department, please visit its website at [www.ct.gov/dph](http://www.ct.gov/dph) or call (860) 509-7270.*

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