

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

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Department of Health and Hospitals News Update

Residents Urged to Use Caution when Operating Generators

Baton Rouge - Every year, people die because of deadly exhaust fumes from generators that seep into homes. It only takes a small opening for enough carbon monoxide to enter a home, killing or injuring residents. That's why the Department of Health and Hospitals is cautioning residents who may be using generators due to power outages caused by Hurricane Gustav to be mindful of the dangerous health risks that may result if not used properly.

Carbon monoxide does not have a smell or color. It builds up in the body through repeated exposures. About the only way to know if you are being exposed to this deadly gas is through the use of a carbon monoxide detector. Get a carbon monoxide detector and make sure it runs off battery power.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include nausea, headache, shortness of breath, dizziness, irritability, confusion and memory loss. Getting to fresh air is essential once the symptoms are recognized, and call for medical help.

Do not run a generator inside your home because the carbon monoxide gases emitted from the generator can kill you. Do not put it in a garage either, because the deadly gas could still enter the home. For the same reason, generators should also not be placed near air conditioning intakes. Use heavy-gauge extension cords to run power from the generator to appliances. If you have to run an extension cord from the generator into the house through an open doorway or window, do not slam the door or window shut on the extension cord. That could result in a short and cause a fire.

Leave just enough space in the door or window to run the cord, and then seal the opening by using duct tape. Check this taped seal frequently for leaks to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning. Do not connect a generator directly to a household electrical system because it can back feed electrical current into power lines. If this is done, utility workers will be unaware that power is running through a line, and they could be electrocuted and killed or injured.

An electrician can install a wiring harness to enable you to attach a generator to your home. This will disconnect the residence's electrical connection to power lines, preventing a safety hazard to electrical workers.

- Store fuel in a container designated for gasoline or diesel. Do not use discarded milk jugs, glass bottles or other containers to store fuel. Some plastics can melt if they come in contact with fuel
- Store fuel for your generator away from the generator, and refuel only after the generator has cooled
- Use a funnel to prevent spills
- To prevent creating a dangerous spark when refueling, make sure the gas can is placed on the ground. Do not refill when the container is in or on a vehicle

- Choose a generator that produces more power than you will need when all electrical appliances are running
- Allow a generator to run for two (2) to three (3) minutes before plugging in a power cord
- Turn off appliances before shutting off a generator to prevent damage to electrical circuits
- Consult the generator owner's manual to determine its power capacity. Most generators are not strong enough to power an entire house, so you will have to ration its use to prevent tripping a circuit breaker on the generator. Each electrical device uses a maximum number of watts. That number usually can be found on a manufacturer's label on the appliance. For example, a 5,000-watt generator can run an average refrigerator, freezer, portable fan and a 60-watt light bulb

Always operate a generator in a clean, dry location. A generator produces enough electricity to electrocute you, so do not run a generator in standing water. Voltage-sensitive appliances such as televisions and computers should not be powered by a generator without some type of surge protection device.

For more information on generators, look at the Consumer Product Safety Commission's Web site: www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/portgen.html

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