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Health officials warn of carbon monoxide danger from gas generators and alternative heating fuels

Public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services are warning that burning alternative fuels in homes and using gas generators for back-up electricity is dangerous.

It is not safe to burn alternative fuels inside the house (such as barbeques, hibachis stoves, or camp stoves). If you use a gas generator for back-up electricity, locate it away from the house and from any attached garage to avoid toxic fumes entering the home.

These devices produce carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless and lethal gas that can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. If people breathe too much of the gas, they are poisoned because red blood cells pick up carbon monoxide faster and hang on to it tighter than they do oxygen. Thus, red blood cells are unable to carry oxygen to the tissues in the body leading to tissue damage and death.

Health officials advise:

- Never use any kind of gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal burning device inside your home or garage;
- Install and test at least one carbon monoxide detector in your home, and check the batteries annually;
- Do not run a car or truck inside an attached garage, even if the door is open;
- Never burn anything in a stove or fireplace that isn't vented to the outside;
- Never heat your house with a gas oven.

The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. However,

people who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from poisoning before ever having symptoms.

DHS data for Oregon shows that in the past two years, 10 people died of unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning. Additional information is on the Web at www.cdc.gov/co/default.htm.