

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Power Outages Increase Risk for Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

GRAND RAPIDS – West Michigan residents are at increased risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning during power outages when generators are used in an unsafe manner. According to a 2015 Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) report, nearly one in five of CO exposures in the state can be traced back to unsafe generator usage, often linked to severe weather events.

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan is alerting residents who have lost power to take precaution if they choose to use a generator as a supplemental source of electricity.

The Healthy Homes Coalition provides these safety tips.

- 1) **Never use a generator inside.** Generators should never be used inside the home. They should also never be used in enclosed spaces like garages, outbuildings, sheds, or basements.
- 2) **Place the generator away from windows, doors.** Prevailing winds can cause exhaust from generators to enter homes through open windows, doors, and other openings. Placing the generator 20 feet from the home assures increased safety.
- 3) **Lock it up.** If you are concerned about theft, invest in a strong cable, chain and lock to secure your generator. Never secure your generator by operating it in an enclosed space.
- 4) **Install an Alarm.** Every home should have at least one working carbon monoxide alarm.

Carbon monoxide is a clear, odorless, tasteless gas that starves the body of oxygen. At low levels, it can make people sick with flu-like symptoms. At high levels it can kill.

“Carbon monoxide is a silent and invisible killer,” said Paul Haan, Executive Director at the Healthy Homes Coalition. “Generators are a frequent source of exposure, including the recent tragic death of an 11 year-old child in Michigan. When using generators, we need to be aware of the potential hazards and take precaution.”

Carbon monoxide is the leading cause of accidental poisoning death in the United States according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While CO poisoning is preventable, it is responsible for approximately 15,000 emergency department visits and nearly 500 deaths annually in the United States.

The Healthy Homes Coalition offers free, battery-operated CO alarm installations for families with children fourteen years of age and younger in the cities of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming thanks to a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). For more information, call (616) 241-3300.

The Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan is an independent, non-profit organization based in Grand Rapids that is improving children's health and wellbeing by eliminating harmful housing conditions. For more information about the Healthy Homes Coalition or carbon monoxide, visit www.healthyhomescoalition.org/carbon-monoxide.

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2013 Annual Report on Carbon Monoxide in Michigan:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch/2013_Annual_Report_of_Carbon_Monoxide_Poisoning_in_Michigan_484733_7.pdf