



# PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 001-18

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### GENERATOR SAFETY

With winter already in full swing, weather-related power outages will be inevitable. Many people, especially those living in rural Pennsylvania, will rely on portable generators to power their homes during such outages. It is important to note that portable generators were involved in the majority of carbon monoxide (CO) related deaths from 1999 through 2012. In fact, portable generators were linked to more than 85 percent of non-fire CO deaths during that time period. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, between 2009 and 2013, there was an average of 73 deaths per year related to CO poisoning, although the exact cause of the poisoning was not specified.<sup>1</sup>

CO is a colorless, odorless gas that is found in the fumes produced when fuel is burned. Fuel is burned by a variety of implements including cars, trucks, small engines, stoves, grills, fireplaces, hot water heaters, and generators. The gas can build up indoors and poison the people and animals who inhale it. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. People often disregard the symptoms as those associated with influenza.<sup>2</sup>

A study released in 2013 revealed that 74 percent of generator-related CO fatalities occurred at a fixed-structure home and were a result of misuse and human error.<sup>3</sup> Generators should never be run indoors (including basements, crawl spaces, and sheds) or inside a garage. They should be kept a minimum of 20 feet from the home and also away from windows and vents to allow for proper ventilation. The Pennsylvania Department of Health recommends installing a battery-operated or battery back-up CO detector near every sleeping area in your home. Be sure to regularly check the detectors to ensure they are working properly.<sup>4</sup>

Portable generators are extremely valuable to residents, especially during the cold winter months. But they need to be used responsibly to keep everyone safe from potential health risks or even death. Stay warm and think spring!

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<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Health. Carbon monoxide poisoning mortality. *Health.pa.gov*. Retrieved on 01/09/2018 from <http://www.health.pa.gov/My%20Health/Environmental%20Health/Environmental%20Public%20Health%20Tracking/Pages/Carbon-Monoxide-Poisoning-Mortality.aspx#.WIS2cZ0o6Uk>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What is carbon monoxide? *CDC.gov*. Retrieved on 01/09/2018 from <https://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission. Winter warning: Portable generators hold top spot in CPSC report on carbon monoxide deaths and incidents. *CPSC.gov*. Retrieved on 01/09/2018 from <https://www.cpsc.gov/content/winter-warning-portable-generators-hold-top-spot-in-cpsc-report-on-carbon-monoxide-deaths>.

<sup>4</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Health. Carbon monoxide poisoning mortality. *Health.pa.gov*. Retrieved on 01/09/2018 from <http://www.health.pa.gov/My%20Health/Environmental%20Health/Environmental%20Public%20Health%20Tracking/Pages/Carbon-Monoxide-Poisoning-Mortality.aspx#.WIS2cZ0o6Uk>.