

Health Officials Warn of Carbon Monoxide Danger

by Bend Weekly News Sources

In the wake of at least five reported carbon monoxide deaths and 100 illnesses in the Northwest this week, public health officials in the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) are reminding people that it's never safe to burn alternative fuels inside their homes.

"In these recent cases, power outages and extreme cold caused people to seek ways to keep warm," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist in the DHS Public Health Division. "But you should not burn gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal inside your home. Even operating devices that burn these fuels inside a basement, garage or near an open window can be dangerous."

Kohn said the danger is that 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 than they do oxygen. Thus, oxygen is prevented from getting into the body and the result is tissue damage and even death.

"Carbon monoxide can poison you to death while you sleep, but it's completely preventable," Kohn said.

Kohn advised the following:

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;

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, according to Kohn.

It is estimated that each year, more than 500 Americans needlessly die from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, Kohn noted. DHS data for Oregon shows that in the past two years, 10 people died of unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning. Additional information is on the CDC Web site.

Health Officials Warn of Carbon Monoxide Danger by Bend Weekly News Sources