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'Tis the Season for Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

With the holidays upon us, the heat is being turned on and we are spending more time with the ones we love in the warmth of our homes. As we prepare to venture into the New Year, the Central Connecticut Health District (CCHD) is urging residents to keep in mind the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless gas that can be fatal. The symptoms of CO mimic the flu, including headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, vomiting or loss of consciousness. The effects of CO poisoning can vary with age and overall health of the individual, as well as how long they are exposed to the toxic gas. If several members of a household experience these symptoms while at home and then feel better when they leave the home, it is a good indicator that there is a dangerous level of CO in the home.

According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), hundreds of Connecticut residents are taken to the emergency department every winter and some are hospitalized or die due to accidental carbon monoxide poisoning. These issues are usually caused by malfunctioning furnaces, improperly placed portable generators and charcoal grills being used indoors.

Last year, Tropical Storm Irene and the October snowstorm left most of the state without electricity and resulted in Connecticut having one of the largest CO poisoning in the US. DPH reports collecting 143 laboratory reports of CO poisoning; of these, 5 were deaths. Upon questioning the families involved, only 35% of homes were equipped with properly functioning CO detectors. A CO detector should always be placed near each sleeping area in a home to alert residents when there is a high level of CO.

To prevent CO poisoning, portable generators should be placed at least 20 feet from the home and should never be used in enclosed spaces such as porches, carports, garages or basements, even if the doors and windows are opened. Opening windows and doors will not be enough to release all of the built up CO levels and can still be hazardous.

CCHD recommends the following safety tips to ensure CO poisoning:

- Get out of the house **immediately** if you or your family has sudden and unexplained onset of symptoms of CO poisoning, including vomiting, dizziness, nausea, headache, fatigue or loss of consciousness.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector near all sleeping areas. Be sure to replace all batteries at least once a year and replace the detectors every five years.
- Have your heating systems, chimney flues, gas appliances and generators checked, cleaned and serviced every year, as needed, by qualified heating/appliance contractors
- Be sure to use gasoline-powered equipment outside and away from doors, windows or air intake vents
- Only use grills outdoors
- Never use portable generators, pressure washer machines or other gasoline-powered equipment (including tools) in your home, basement, garage, carport or other enclosed spaces. Always make sure that generators are at least 20 feet from your home.

For more information about CO poisoning, visit the CT DPH Environmental & Occupational Health Assessment Program at www.ct.gov/dph/co, or by calling 860-509-7742. The Connecticut Poison Control

Center can be reached by calling 1-800-222-1222.

Further information about carbon monoxide or any other public health related issue can be directed to the Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, by calling 860-721-2822 or by visiting our website at www.ccthd.org.