

Health and Safety Information During a Disaster

Polk County Health Department • 1907 Carpenter Ave, Des Moines, IA 50314 • 515-286-3798 • www.polkcountyiowa.gov/health

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Overview: Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can cause illness and even death before you are aware you are being exposed to it. Improper use of gas-powered generators and other power equipment while cleaning up after a flood can increase the risk of CO poisoning.

Where is CO found?

CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by cars and trucks, small gasoline engines, stoves, lanterns, burning charcoal and wood, gas ranges and heating systems. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned by breathing it.

How to Recognize CO Poisoning

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO ingestion can cause loss of consciousness and death.

What should I do if I suspect I've been exposed to CO

- If you feel sick or dizzy, go outside to fresh air immediately.
- If symptoms persist or worsen, consult a health care professional right away.
- It is especially important to contact a health care professional if anyone loses consciousness.

Important CO Poisoning Prevention Tips

- Install a battery-operated CO detector in your home and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- Never run a portable generator, pressure washer, or any portable gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window, door, or vent where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent, or camper.

Food Safety During a Power Outage

Overview: When the power goes out for a prolonged time there is a risk that food in your refrigerator and freezer could spoil or become unsafe. This fact sheet provides guidance for keeping food safe during and after a power outage.

Be Prepared

Make sure you have appliance thermometers in your refrigerator and freezer.

Keep your freezer at or below **0 °F**, and the refrigerator at or below **40 °F**.

In case of a power outage, the appliance thermometers will indicate the temperatures in the refrigerator and freezer to help you determine if the food is safe.

If possible, freeze containers of water for ice before a power outage to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers in case the power goes out.

When the Power Goes Out Safe Cooking

Temperatures as measured with a food thermometer

| | Internal Temperature |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Ground Beef | 160°F |
| Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb | 145°F |
| Poultry | 165°F |
| Fresh Pork | 160°F |
| Seafood | 145°F |
| Leftovers & Casseroles | 165°F |

Electrical Hazards

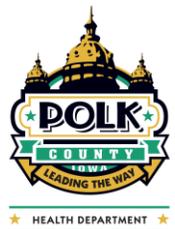
After a hurricane, flood or other natural disaster you need to be careful to avoid electrical hazards both in your home and elsewhere.

- *Never* touch a fallen power line. Call the power company to report fallen power lines.
- Avoid contact with overhead power lines during cleanup and other activities.
- Do not drive through standing water if downed powerlines are in the water.
- If a powerline falls across your car while you are driving, stay inside the vehicle and continue to drive away from the line. If the engine stalls, do not turn off the ignition. Warn people not to touch the car or the line. Call or ask someone to call the local utility company and emergency services. Do not allow anyone other than emergency personnel to approach your vehicle.
- If electrical circuits and electrical equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not enter standing water to access the main power switch. Call an electrician to turn it off.
- Never turn power on or off yourself or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician. All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service. Have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question.
- If you see frayed wiring or sparks when you restore power, or if there is an odor of something burning but no visible fire, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the main circuit breaker.
- Consult your utility company about using electrical equipment, including power generators. Do not connect generators to your home's electrical circuit without the approved, automatic-interrupt device. A generator is on line when electrical service is restored, it can become a major fire hazard and may endanger line workers helping to restore in your area.

Electrical Hazards continued

If you believe someone has been electrocuted take the following steps:

1. Look first. Don't touch. The person may still be in contact with the electrical source. Touching the person may pass the current through you.
2. Call or have someone else call 911 or emergency medical help.
3. Turn off the source of electricity if possible. If not, move the source away from you and the affected person using a nonconducting object made of cardboard, plastic or wood.
4. Once the person is free of the source of electricity, check the person's breathing and pulse. If either has stopped or seems dangerously slow or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately.
5. If the person is faint or pale or shows other signs of shock, lay him or her down with the head slightly lower than the trunk of the body and the legs elevated.
6. Don't touch burns, break blisters, or remove burned clothing. Electrical shock may cause burns inside the body, so be sure the person is taken to a doctor.



Polk County Health Department
1907 Carpenter Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50314
515-286-3798
www.polkcountyiowa.gov/health