

# NEWS from CPSC

## U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Office of Information and Public Affairs

Washington, DC 20207

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2008

Release #08-232

CPSC Recall Hotline: (800) 638-2772

CPSC Media Contact: (301) 504-7908

### ***Surviving the Aftermath of the Storm*** **Midwest Residents Are Warned of Deadly Hazards that Arise After the Flood Waters Recede**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As flood waters begin to recede and residents return home, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issues a warning to those affected by the floods in the Midwest. When there's a power outage, NEVER use portable generators inside the home, in an attached garage or in any other partially enclosed space. Generator exhaust contains high levels of colorless, odorless carbon monoxide (CO) which can kill in minutes.

334 people died from generator-related CO poisoning from 1999-2006. Recent data show that as use of generators has increased, so too have deaths – tragically there are about 50 per year. Many of these deaths occurred after major storms knocked out power.

The Commission provides these important life-saving tips:

#### **Generator Safety**

- **Never** use a portable generator indoors – including open garages, basements, crawlspaces and sheds. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent CO buildup in the home.
- During use, keep portable generators outdoors and far away from open doors, windows and vents, so that CO does not build up indoors.
- If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air right away. Exposure to CO from generators can quickly lead to incapacitation and death.
- Keep generators dry. Wait for the rain to pass before using a generator. Consumer-grade generators are not weatherproof and can pose the risk of electrocution and shock when used in wet conditions.
- Do not connect the generator directly into your home's electrical system through a receptacle outlet – this is an extremely dangerous practice that poses a fire hazard and an electrocution hazard to utility workers and neighbors served by the same transformer.
- If using a generator, plug individual appliances into heavy duty, outdoor-rated extension cords and plug cords into the generator.

#### **Other Precautions**

- Check that the extension cords have a wire gauge adequate for the appliance loads and have all three prongs, including a grounding pin.
- Keep charcoal grills outside. Never use them indoors. Burning charcoal in an enclosed space can produce lethal levels of carbon monoxide.

- Make sure the batteries in your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm are fresh. Test these alarms to make sure they are working.
- Exercise caution when using candles. Use flashlights instead. If you must use candles, do not burn them on or near anything that can catch fire. Keep burning candles away from drafts. Never leave burning candles unattended. Extinguish candles when leaving the room.

### **Wet Carpets and Furniture Are Dangerous to your Health**

- Microorganisms may grow in these water-damaged products and may cause allergic reactions and infections. For more information, go to [www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/425.html](http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/425.html)
- Discard mattresses, wicker furniture, straw baskets and the like that have been water damaged. These cannot be recovered by washing or cleaning procedures.
- Throw out wet room-size carpets, drapes, upholstered furniture, stuffed toys, ceiling tiles and anything that can't be picked up and cleaned by dry cleaning, steam cleaning or put in a washing machine or dryer.
- Remove and replace wet insulation.

### **Avoid Electrical and Gas Hazards**

- Look for signs that your appliances have gotten wet. Discard electrical or gas appliances that have been wet because they pose electric shock and fire hazards.
- Before using your appliances, have a professional or your gas or electric company evaluate your home and replace all gas control valves, circuit breakers, and fuses that have been under water.

### **Dangers to Children**

- Medicines and chemicals should be thrown away. Water may have infected the integrity of the medicine. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers additional safety tips. For more information, go to [www.hhs.gov/news/broadcast/2005/CrawfordMedicationSafety.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/broadcast/2005/CrawfordMedicationSafety.html)
- Young children and water don't mix. Watch children around buckets, tubs and standing water in and around the home. Even small amounts of water can be a drowning hazard.