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## Christie Administration Encourages New Jersey Residents to Take Caution When Using Portable Generators

Friday, October 4, 2013

Tags: [Hurricane Sandy](#)

### **Awards \$400,000 to New Jersey Poison Information and Education System for Outreach and Education**

Trenton, NJ - New Jersey Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd and Acting Director and State Fire Marshall William Kramer are urging residents to protect their health by following manufacturers' guidelines and taking basic safety measures when using portable generators. In New Jersey, five people died from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning due to the improper use of generators after Superstorm Sandy.

"In the two weeks following Sandy, 398 patients were treated for CO exposure in New Jersey Emergency Departments, while only 14 patients were treated for exposure in the two weeks prior to the storm," said Health Commissioner O'Dowd. "CO poisoning is called the 'Silent Killer,' because it is a gas that gives no warning – you can't see it, smell it or taste it. However, exposure to carbon monoxide from generators is preventable, and I strongly suggest everyone learn the basics of generator safety."

Exposure to CO can produce headaches, sleepiness, fatigue, confusion and irritability at low levels. At higher levels, it can result in nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeat, impaired vision and coordination, and death.

Between October 28 and December 27, 2012, the New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES) received 448 Sandy related calls. Of these calls, 324 were related to exposure to CO or contact with possibly toxic substances. Nationally, 81 people die each year due to CO poisoning from the use of a generator.

The Department is awarding NJPIES \$400,000 over the next two years in Social Services Block Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The funding will allow NJPIES to continue 24/7 availability of and access to poison intervention specialists via telephone. The grant will also fund the creation of storm-related educational materials and training sessions with local health departments on environmental health hazards – including CO poisoning. The training will be available statewide, but with a focus on coastal and northern counties hardest hit by Sandy.

"The New Jersey Poison Information and Education System of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, is very grateful to the New Jersey Department of Health for providing us with the opportunity to cooperate in these efforts to increase public awareness of the dangers associated with natural disasters. These funds will allow us to increase our public outreach and prevention efforts regarding carbon monoxide exposures and poisonings," said Steven Marcus, MD, Executive and Medical Director, NJPIES.

If you are using a generator and suspect CO poisoning take immediate action including:

Call 9-1-1 immediately if a person is not breathing, is unconscious or unresponsive, or having seizures or convulsions

Exit the home/building/enclosed space immediately

Contact your local fire department

From a safe area, call the NJ Poison Experts at 800-222-1222, for immediate treatment advice.

"While portable generators can be very helpful during outages, it is imperative that the public follow safety guidelines when using one," said Acting Director and State Fire Marshall William Kramer. "Running generators within a basement,

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garage or any enclosed or partially-enclosed structure will lead to a dangerous – and often fatal – accumulation of carbon monoxide. Because the gas is odorless and colorless, its' effects are not recognized and people will fall asleep or not wake up. When this happens, it is usually too late for them to survive.”

The following safety tips should be followed when using generators:

Never run a generator within a basement, garage or any enclosed or partially enclosed structure as this will lead to a dangerous and often fatal accumulation of carbon monoxide

Never position a generator too close to your home's windows and doors.

Use battery-operated carbon monoxide alarms. Test and change the batteries at regular intervals

Never connect a generator directly to your home's wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use. This can cause backfeeding along power lines and electrocute anyone coming in contact with them, including lineworkers making repairs

Always plug appliances directly into generators

Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Make sure extension cords are free of cuts or tears and the plug has three prongs.

Ensure your generator is properly grounded

Never overload a generator. A portable generator should only be used when necessary to power essential equipment or appliances

Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down

Keep the generator dry. Operate it on a dry surface under an open structure

Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby

Never fuel a generator while it is operating and wait until it is cool to the touch

Read and adhere to the manufacturer's instructions for safe operation. Never cut corners when it comes to safety

For more information on generator safety, please visit: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/co/generator.shtml>

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