



# NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

**BUILDING STRONG®**

**For Immediate Release:**

October 28, 2009

Release No.: 09-30

**Contact:**

George Stringham, 314-331-8095

George.E.Stringham@usace.army.mil

## **Carbon Monoxide: Silent but Deadly**

**ST. LOUIS** – Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a colorless, tasteless, and odorless gas that can bring a tragic end to the lives of recreational enthusiasts. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes can kill you before you are aware that it is present. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Each year, more than 400 Americans die from unintentional CO poisoning, more than 20,000 visit the emergency room and more than 4,000 are hospitalized due to CO poisoning.”

The US Army Corps of Engineers encourages recreational enthusiasts, such as campers, boaters and hunters, to be aware of this silent and invisible killer this winter. Winter is a particularly significant time for such exposure, as it is the time that furnaces, boilers, generators, and portable heaters are running overtime, to keep us warm. The following safety information describes where carbon monoxide poisoning can accumulate inside a motor home, camper, caravan, trailer, houseboat, tent, or hunting blind, how to spot the symptoms of poisoning, and the steps you can take to prevent carbon monoxide buildup.

### **Why is Carbon Monoxide so dangerous?**

Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur in any situation where a person is exposed to an incomplete burning of fossil fuel. Thus, engine exhaust, defective furnaces or heaters, wood-burning stoves, gas stoves & ovens, space heaters, portable grills, portable generators and camp fires can all cause CO poisoning. These poisonings occur most often when this type of equipment is used in buildings or semi-enclosed spaces such as motor home, camper, caravan, trailer, houseboat, tent, or hunting blind. Be aware that carbon monoxide can remain in or around your recreational vehicle at dangerous levels even if equipment or engines are no longer running.

The colorless, tasteless, and odorless gas enters a victim's bloodstream through the lungs, blocking oxygen and preventing the body from properly functioning. Prolonged exposure to small concentrations or sudden exposures to high concentrations are equally lethal. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include eye irritation, headache, nausea, weakness, and dizziness. These symptoms are often confused with seasickness or intoxication so those affected may not receive needed medical attention before it becomes fatal.

### **Common Carbon Monoxide sources onboard recreational vehicles may include but are not limited to:**

- Engines
- Generators
- Gas Stove and ovens
- Space & water heaters

- more -

## Protecting Yourself & Others

The US Army Corps of Engineers recommends recreational enthusiast take the following steps to protect themselves and others from the dangers of carbon monoxide:

- In any area where you sleep, especially in the enclosed space of a motor home, camper, caravan, trailer, houseboat, tent, or hunting blind it is crucial that you have a CO detector to ensure that you are not inhaling the potentially poisonous fumes of carbon monoxide. Do not ignore the alarms and replace the batteries as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Maintain a fresh circulation of air through and around your recreational vehicle at all times.
- Treat symptoms of seasickness as possible carbon monoxide poisoning and quickly get the victim to a well ventilated area.
- Avoid any area of the recreational vehicle where exhaust fumes may be present. If exhaust fumes are detected, take immediate action to ventilate the affected area.
- Most importantly, be aware of the risks associated with carbon monoxide, what it is; where it may accumulate; and the symptoms of CO poisoning. To protect yourself, your passengers, and those around you, learn all you can about CO.

More information concerning carbon monoxide poisoning can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/> , the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission <http://www.cpsc.gov/nsn/COSafety.pdf>, the CO Action Group <http://www.coactiongroup.org/> or by contacting your local U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Project Office.