



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Be aware of generator and chain saw dangers following power outages

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Jim McVay, Dr.P.A.
(334) 206-5600

The risk for injuries associated with generators and chain saws increases after natural disasters such as hurricanes. If misused, both of these products can lead to injuries and even deaths, the Alabama Department of Public Health cautions.

Power outages that follow storms prompt people to use generators which produce carbon monoxide. Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms and ultimately lead to coma and death. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, toxic gas that is produced by all fossil fuel burning appliances and automobiles. Exposure to carbon monoxide is responsible for more fatal unintentional poisonings in the United States than any other agent.

Follow these recommendations for the safe use of generators:

- Have a carbon monoxide monitor with fresh batteries in it and place it in the residence high on the wall. Carbon monoxide is lighter than air and rises towards the ceiling.
- Place generators as far away from the home as possible. People have had carbon monoxide poisoning from generators as far away as 30 feet away from the house.
- If using the generator to power a window air conditioner, put the generator as far away as possible from that window, preferably on the other side of the house.
- Never hook up the generator to the home's normal wiring. Improper wiring of a home generator can create back-feed in the electrical wires to the house and could injure or kill utility workers repairing the electrical lines.

In addition to generator safety, another concern after storms is the safe use of chain saws. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 36,000 people are treated each year in hospital emergency departments for injuries from using chain saws. Before using a chain saw, be sure you know how to operate it. Read and understand the operator's manual and observe an experienced operator in action before starting work.

Follow these guidelines from the CDC to prevent chain saw injuries:

- Operate, adjust and maintain the saw according to manufacturer's instructions provided in the owner's manual.
- Properly sharpen chain saw blades and properly lubricate the blade with bar and chain oil. Additionally, the operator should periodically check and adjust the tension of the chain saw blade to ensure good cutting action.

- Choose the proper size of chain saw to match the job, and include safety features such as a chain brake, front and rear hand guards, stop switch, chain catcher and a spark arrester.
- Wear the appropriate protective equipment, including hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, heavy work gloves, cut-resistant leg wear (chain saw chaps) that extend from the waist to the top of the foot, and boots which cover the ankle.
- Avoid contact with power lines until the lines are verified as being de-energized.
- Always cut at waist level or below to ensure that you maintain secure control over the chain saw.
- Bystanders or coworkers should remain at least two tree lengths (at least 150 feet) away from anyone cutting down a tree and at least 30 feet from anyone operating a chain saw to remove limbs or cut a fallen tree.
- If injury occurs, apply direct pressure over site(s) of heavy bleeding; this act may save lives.

When cutting, beware of injury from the release of bent trees or branches. Take extra care in cutting “spring poles,” trees or branches that have gotten bent, twisted or caught under another object during a high wind. If the tree or the branch is suddenly released, it may strike the person cutting it, or a bystander, with enough force to cause serious injury or death. Even a seemingly small tree or branch (2 inches in diameter, for example) may pose a hazard when it is released from tension.

To avoid injury

- Identify the maximum point of tension on the spring pole.
- Slowly shave the underside of the tree rather than cut through to allow the tree or branch to release tension slowly.

How the public can help

- It is best to have a chain saw operator who has training and experience in safe chain saw use and cutting techniques.
- Be sure that bystanders are at a safe distance from cutting activities, the chain saw operator uses personal protective equipment, and workers follow safety guidelines.

For more information on injury prevention, please visit the Alabama Department of Public Health’s website at www.adph.org.