NEWS RELEASE
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Be aware of hypothermia, carbon monoxide dangers after power outages

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The prediction of ice storms which may result in electrical power outages prompts the Alabama Department of Public Health to remind the public about the health risks that follow, including hypothermia and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Hypothermia is a lowering of the temperature of the body's inner core, and it can occur at outside temperatures as high as 45 degrees F. When the core temperature falls, bodily functions are shut down. The signs and symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, dizziness, numbness, weakness, impaired judgment, impaired vision and drowsiness.

Most hypothermia victims are elderly persons who are unable to keep sufficiently warm in winter. As the body ages, it gradually loses its sensitivity to cold. An elderly person's body temperature may drop without the individual being aware of it. In addition, the aging body also becomes increasingly less able to reverse a fall in temperature. This reduced ability to adapt is also present in the very young. Aside from the elderly, babies are the most common victims of hypothermia.

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "Remember to check on elderly neighbors and relatives at this time. The risk of hypothermia is increased if an elderly person is also suffering from a disorder that reduces the body's heat production, has impaired mental function or reduced mobility. Certain drugs such as tranquilizers may also contribute to the onset of hypothermia."

An elderly person's living quarters should be heated to at least 65degrees F., he or she should wear suitable clothing, have plenty of warm blankets available and eat nutritious food. Abnormally cold weather can also increase the threat of home fires due to improper use of alternate heating sources.

Carbon monoxide and generator safety

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. After power is lost, many

people use items that could produce carbon monoxide. Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause flu-like symptoms and ultimately lead to coma and death.

Further risks are posed with the use of camping stoves, portable propane gas stoves and charcoal grills in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. Carbon monoxide poisoning can occur:

- From cooking with charcoal briquettes in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.
- From the use of butane and kerosene space heaters and wood-burning stoves in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces.
- From the operation of gasoline-powered generators in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, or in areas where exhaust from generators can vent into houses through garage doors, windows, or air-intake vents.

If a generator is used, be sure to follow these safety tips:

- Have a carbon monoxide monitor with fresh batteries in it and place it in the house 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 experienced carbon
  monoxide poisoning from generators as far away as 30 feet away from the house.
- Never hook up the generator to the home's normal wiring. Improper wiring of a home generator can create backfeed in the electrical wires to the house and could injure or kill utility workers repairing the electrical lines.

Risks Associated with the Operation of Motor Vehicles

The carbon monoxide in motor vehicle exhaust accounts for the most poisoning deaths in the United States caused by a single agent. Many motor-vehicle related carbon monoxide deaths in garages have occurred even though the garage doors or windows have been open. This suggests that passive ventilation is not adequate to reduce risk in semi-enclosed spaces.

Deaths have also occurred in living or working quarters adjacent to garages with running motor vehicles in them. Carbon monoxide poisoning can also occur inside of a car when the tailpipe of an idling automobile is obstructed by snow or other material. Increased alcohol consumption is related to the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning from motor vehicles.

Dangers are associated with using motor vehicles to keep warm, so follow these precautions:

- Never run an automobile engine, lawnmower or any combustion engine in an enclosed area under any circumstances,
- Never operate motor vehicles in semi-enclosed areas, or in areas where carbon monoxide can vent into residential dwellings,
- Inspect the tailpipe of automobiles for signs of obstruction or damage prior to operating a motor vehicle.