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INCREASE IN CARBON MONOXIDE POISONINGS PROMPTS WARNING

PALM BEACH COUNTY—Carbon Monoxide poisonings have risen at an alarming rate prompting the Palm Beach County Health Department to issue a preventive warning.

With 28 people poisoned by CO already this year, the county is experiencing the highest number of cases ever reported in previous years. Palm Beach County Health Department Epidemiologists continue to track this trend yet have not determined a cause for the big change this year.

“We continue to investigate the causes of the sharp rise this year,” said Health Department Director Alina Alonso, MD. “Carbon Monoxide poisonings are definitely preventable.” Dr. Alonso added that her department is issuing the warning to create awareness that Carbon Monoxide poisoning can be fatal and educate people on prevention measures they can follow.

Invisible, odorless and tasteless, CO is a highly poisonous gas produced by burning fuels such as gasoline, natural gas, kerosene, charcoal and wood. To date, six events involved cars left running in garages affecting 15 people, three events involved the use of grills inside homes affecting 11 people and one event involved a boat that affected two people. Of these, three died. Symptoms of CO poisoning include fatigue, chest pain, impaired vision and coordination, headaches, dizziness, confusion, and nausea.

Dr. Alonso's suggestions for preventing carbon monoxide poisoning include:

- Install and use fuel-burning appliances according to manufacturer instructions.
- Have fuel-burning appliances inspected and serviced annually by a licensed contractor.
- Inspect exhaust ventilation systems, including chimneys, flues and vents, every year.
- **NEVER** burn charcoal inside a house, garage, vehicle or tent, even in a fireplace.
- Avoid using unvented gas or kerosene heaters in enclosed spaces, especially sleeping areas.
- **NEVER** leave an automobile running in a garage, even with the garage door open.
- Do not leave the rear window or tailgate of a vehicle open while driving. CO from the exhaust can be pulled inside the car, van or camper.
- Install CO alarms inside the house. Purchase battery operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery backup according to manufacturer's installation instructions.
- The CO alarm should meet the most recent UL 2034 standard, IAS 6-96 standard or the CSA 6.19.01 standard.
- Replace CO alarm batteries once a year and test alarms frequently.
- Replace CO alarms once every five years in accordance with recent recommendations by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- **NEVER** use a portable generator indoors, including in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, sheds and other enclosed or partially enclosed areas. **ALWAYS** place portable generators outdoors on a dry surface, away from doors, windows, vents and air conditioning equipment that could allow CO to enter.

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