



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Power Outage Safety

As an ice storm has affected Shelby County, the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) urges residents to be prepared should power outages occur. "The biggest threat during power outages is carbon monoxide poisoning," said IDPH Medical Director, Dr. Patricia Quinlisk. "When people use gas-powered generators in a confined space, there is the risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning." CO is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled.

If a power outage occurs and your heating system fails, it is important to remember these safety tips:

- ✓ If you plan to use a wood stove, fireplace, or space heater, be extremely careful. Follow the manufacturer's instructions
- ✓ Use fireplace, wood stoves, or other combustion heaters
- ✓ only if they are properly vented to the outside and do not leak flue gas into the indoor air space.
- ✓ Do not burn paper in a fireplace.
- ✓ Never place a space heater on top of furniture or near water.
- ✓ Never leave children unattended near a space heater.
- ✓ Make sure that the cord of an electric space heater is not a tripping hazard but do not run the cord under carpets or rugs.
- ✓ Avoid using extension cords to plug in your space heater.
- ✓ If your space heater has a damaged electrical cord or produces sparks, do not use it.
- ✓ Store a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher near the area to be heated.
- ✓ Protect yourself from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning by installing a battery-operated CO detector and never using generators, grills, camp stoves, or similar devices indoors.

Exposure to carbon monoxide can cause loss of consciousness and death. The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from carbon monoxide poisoning before ever having symptoms. If you experience these symptoms, go outside immediately and call your health care professional right away.

Food safety is also a concern during power outages. To protect against illness caused by food spoilage:

- ✓ Never taste food to determine its safety.
- ✓ Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.
- ✓ Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 41 °F for two hours. If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while they are still at safe temperatures, it's important that the food is thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature to assure that any foodborne bacteria are destroyed.

Light your home safely:

- ✓ Use battery-powered flashlights or lanterns rather than candles, if possible.
- ✓ Never leave lit candles unattended.

More information on winter weather safety can be found at [http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/winter\\_weather.asp](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/adper/winter_weather.asp).