



# Barry-Eaton District Health Department

Be Active • Be Safe • Be Healthy

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## For Immediate Release

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### Public Safety Announcement: What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out

Due to the recent high winds in the area, portions of Barry and Eaton counties are without electrical power at this time. Here are some important safety tips about carbon monoxide poisoning, food safety, and water safety to remember during a power outage:

#### Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled. When power outages occur, the use of other sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, or cooking can cause CO to build up. CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, lanterns, and gas ranges, or by burning charcoal and wood. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned and can die from breathing CO. Every year, more than 500 people die in the United States from accidental CO poisoning.

To prevent CO poisoning, generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices should never be used inside a home, basement, garage, or camper – or outside near an open window.

Every home should have at least one working carbon monoxide detector. The detector's batteries should be checked each month. CO detectors should be installed on each level of the home and outside sleeping areas. CO detectors should not be installed in attics or basements unless they include a sleeping area.

#### How to Recognize CO Poisoning

Exposure to CO can cause loss of consciousness and death. The most common signs of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever appearing sick. If CO poisoning is suspected, seek medical care immediately.

#### Important CO Poisoning Prevention Tips

- Never use a gas range or oven to heat a home
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent, or camper
- Never run a generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented. Keep vents and flues free of debris, as this can block ventilation lines.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window, door, or vent where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage
- If conditions are too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter. Please call 211 for more information on shelters that may be available.

#### Food Safety for Your Home

If the power was out for less than 2 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to eat. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer.

If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, follow these guidelines:

- For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours (1 day). A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours (2 days). Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and leftovers that could spoil into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive ~~Styrofoam~~ styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a digital quick-response thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

### **Food Safety for Restaurants and Businesses**

Food establishment operators are reminded to follow the instructions in the “Emergency Action Plans for Retail Food Establishments” regarding operating during power and water outages. This document is available on the Michigan Department of Agriculture website at the following web link: <http://bit.ly/2nj1NjU>. Food establishments without power AND water should cease operation unless they have approved emergency measures in place to provide power and a safe water source.

### **Safe Drinking Water for Your Home**

When the power goes out, make sure you are using safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene, which could include bottled, boiled, or treated water.

Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.

More information about power outage safety tips from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services can be found online at <http://bit.ly/2II1NNQ> or at [www.michigan.gov/michiganprepares](http://www.michigan.gov/michiganprepares). Questions about carbon monoxide and food and water safety can also be directed to the Barry-Eaton District Health Department’s Environmental Health Division at (269) 945-9516 ext. 35 in Barry County or (517) 541-2615 in Eaton County.

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