

NEWS *from* SEMO

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NEW YORKERS WARNED OF DANGERS OF CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Citizens urged to “Be Prepared” for challenges of winter months ahead

As colder weather becomes the norm in the Northeast, John R. Gibb, Director of the New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO), today encouraged New Yorkers to make sure their home heating systems are working to ensure their safety throughout the winter heating season to avoid the perils of carbon monoxide poisoning.

“Carbon monoxide poisoning is a silent, deadly killer that claims about 1,000 lives each year in the United States,” Gibb said. “There are some simple common sense steps New Yorkers should take to protect themselves and loved ones over the coming winter months.”

The Director issued this advice to combat carbon monoxide poisoning as part of SEMO’s annual winter preparedness message in advance of New York State’s observance of Winter Weather Awareness Week, which runs from Sunday, October 28, through November 3.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can be produced by such common items as home heating systems, obstructed chimneys and automotive exhaust. The gas can also be produced by poorly vented generators, kerosene heaters, gas grills and other cooking and heating items when used improperly during the winter months.

“Have a professional check out the furnace, woodstove and chimney to ensure that they are in good working order,” Gibb advised. “Make sure the flue is clear. Never run generators indoors and open a window slightly when using a kerosene heater.”

He also said that people should never use charcoal to cook indoors and never use a gas oven to heat the residence.

“Most importantly, make sure that you have carbon monoxide, smoke and heat detectors properly installed in your home and test the batteries,” he said. The Director pointed out that the

changing of the clocks on November 4 for the end of Daylight Saving Time is the perfect occasion to put new batteries in both smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

The SEMO Director also urged New Yorkers to have their motor vehicles thoroughly inspected before the start of the winter driving season, including their exhaust systems. “As the weather turns colder, never run a motor vehicle in a closed garage,” he said.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include sleepiness, headaches and dizziness. Gibb said that if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, ventilate the area and get to a hospital.

Referring to the Western New York ice storm and the lake-effect snows in Central New York that occurred last winter, Gibb reminded New Yorkers that winter storms can come at any time and not to wait for the official start of winter on December 22.

“That’s why it makes sense to prepare ourselves, our homes and our vehicles for winter now,” he said. “And that includes changing our mindset that we need to slow down on the road and drive according to the weather conditions.”

Gibb urged citizens to develop an emergency plan for home and at work, know who to call and where to go in case of emergency, prepare a portable cache of emergency supplies, and “winterize” their vehicles.

He advised citizens to be aware of local weather conditions by listening to local television and radio stations or the NOAA Weather Radio and then plan activities accordingly.

“Motorists should drive with extreme care during the winter,” Gibb said. “When severe weather is forecast, stay at home unless you absolutely have to drive. If you must go out, plan your stops, clean the vehicle completely of snow and ice, and always match your speed to road conditions.”

Finally, he emphasized that winter is especially challenging for the elderly and physically disabled. “Keep an eye on your neighbor and be prepared to lend a helping hand,” he said. “With a bit of planning and by using some common sense, this winter will be safer and more enjoyable for everyone.”

For more information on how individuals can be better prepared for emergencies and for winter safety tips, visit the SEMO website at www.semo.state.ny.us.

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