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Urges Communities Affected by Hurricane Laura to Avoid Indoor Air Dangers

DALLAS - (April 31, 2020) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reminds communities, families, and business owners to be aware of conditions that could lead to poor or dangerous indoor air quality following Hurricane Laura. Most importantly, always operate portable generators according to the instructions and always run them outside, far away from buildings. Running a portable generator inside can lead to injury or death from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Indoor air quality can be impacted by many conditions that commonly occur following a hurricane. Please be aware of these hazards if your home, school, or business sustained damage from Hurricane Laura. As always, please heed instructions from local authorities on when it is safe to return to an evacuated area, and do not enter a damaged building unless it is safe to do so.

Use portable generators safely

Never use a portable generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds or similar areas. Deadly levels of carbon monoxide (CO) can quickly build up in these areas and can linger for hours, even after the generator has shut off. Because it is impossible to see, taste or smell the toxic fumes, CO can kill you before you are aware it is in your home. The effects of CO exposure can vary greatly from person to person depending on age, overall health and the concentration and length of exposure.

Avoid contact with building debris

Debris from damaged homes and buildings can contain hazardous substances, especially in older buildings. Elevated concentrations of airborne asbestos can occur if asbestos-containing materials present in the home are disturbed. Airborne asbestos can cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings. such as lead and asbestos. Lead is a highly toxic metal that produces a range of adverse health effects, particularly in young children. Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in an elevated concentration of lead dust in the air. When entering a storm-damaged building, at a minimum, wear an N-95 respirator mask, goggles and protective gloves.

Mold can form after floods

Flood water can make the air in your home unhealthy, because when things remain wet for more than two days, they usually get moldy. Inhaling mold can cause adverse health effects, including allergic reactions. Mold also can damage materials in your home. When entering a flood-damaged building, at a minimum, wear an N-95 respirator mask, goggles and protective gloves.

Please visit EPA's website for more information on indoor air quality safety:

<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality>

EPA continues to support FEMA, state, local, and tribal partners in response to Hurricane Laura. EPA's Region 6 headquarters office in Dallas is taking action to ensure Superfund sites are secure following the storm, to assist public drinking water systems with rapid assessments, and to seamlessly integrate emergency response activities with Texas, Louisiana, and other federal response agencies. EPA encourages affected communities to continue staying alert for instructions from local authorities. Additional information on Hurricane Laura can be found on <https://response.epa.gov/hurricanelaura>

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