

Carbon monoxide dangers in the spotlight

Fire officials caution frustrated homeowners to ensure generators are being used properly.

By SEAN TEEHAN
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A misunderstanding may have saved Richard Connors' life.

When Dennis firefighters showed up on Knox Road in Dennisport on Monday, Connors thought they were responding to a call he had made earlier. He stepped out of his house to speak with them.

The firefighters were responding to another call but sensed something was amiss when the 78-year-old Connors was disoriented and showed signs of medical distress.

They measured carbon monoxide levels inside Connors' house and found a gas-powered electricity generator equipped with an improvised venting system in the basement was leaking a lethal amount of carbon monoxide into the house.

While generators offered relief to some of the thousands of Cape Codders left without electricity after the weekend blizzard, public safety personnel have been busy the last few days responding to problems caused by ones being used or poorly installed.

Many people who never used a generator before are installing them in their homes, said Jennifer Mieth, a spokeswoman for State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan. "We're seeing quite a bit of it. They shouldn't just run out and buy a generator at Home Depot without an electrician to install it."

Running a gas-powered generator indoors releases the same amount of carbon monoxide as running more than 100 cars inside a house, said Patty Davis, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. The invisible, scentless and tasteless gas can kill an entire family within a matter of minutes, she said.

The number of carbon monoxide deaths from generators increased from seven in 1999 to 67 in 2009, according to safety commission estimates.

The Home Depot stores in

Hyannis and other nearby towns have seen a strong demand for generators, a spokeswoman for the chain said. Stores in Bridgewater, Plymouth and Somerset have all seen a steady increase in generator sales over the past few months, she said.

Connors had trouble despite having experience with generators.

"We had used (the generator) a number of times, and I thought the exhaust was well-sealed," Connors said Tuesday. He thinks his unit leaked dangerous levels of carbon monoxide because he left it on for upwards of 40 hours - longer than ever before.

Connors, his 68-year-old wife and 43-year-old daughter were lucky. They were fitted with oxygen masks and taken to Cape Cod Hospital where they were observed by medical staff and released a few hours later.

Mashpee firefighters came across what likely would have been a fatal case of carbon monoxide poisoning on Sunday afternoon if a resident hadn't reported symptoms, Mashpee Fire Chief George Baker said.

A generator on the back deck of the Main Street house was placed in a way that allowed carbon monoxide to seep inside, Baker said. The house registered more than 300 parts per million, Baker said, three times the lethal dose.

"We had more than one home that had detectable levels of carbon monoxide because of generator issues," Baker said. "I definitely chalk it up to misuse and just lack of awareness."

Generators can also cause electrical and fire hazards, as demonstrated by a basement blaze Saturday on Castle Road in East Falmouth.

Residents at the house powered too many appliances with their generator, said Falmouth acting Deputy Fire Chief Timothy Smith. Heat from the overloaded equipment sparked a fire in the basement, causing smoke and structural damage.

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GENERATOR SAFETY

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- Never use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home.
- Test CO alarms often and replace batteries when needed.
- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the entire extension cord is free of cuts or

tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.

- Never plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.

- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment.

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.

- Always store fuel outside of living areas in properly labeled, non-glass containers.

- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration



Sandwich building inspector Paul Spiro surveys beachfront erosion near Salt Marsh Road after last weekend's blizzard.

STEVE HEASLIP/CAPE COD TIMES

Sandwich homes declared uninhabitable

Storm-fueled erosion undercuts foundations and dunes.

By GEORGE BRENNAN and DOUG FRASER
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EAST SANDWICH - Manuel Antonio closed on the purchase of a cottage on Captain Crocker Road in East Sandwich last week.

This week, the Fall River man was repairing the damage caused by the weekend nor'easter that ripped the skirting off the bottom of his newly purchased vacation home. A sign on the front of the cottage,

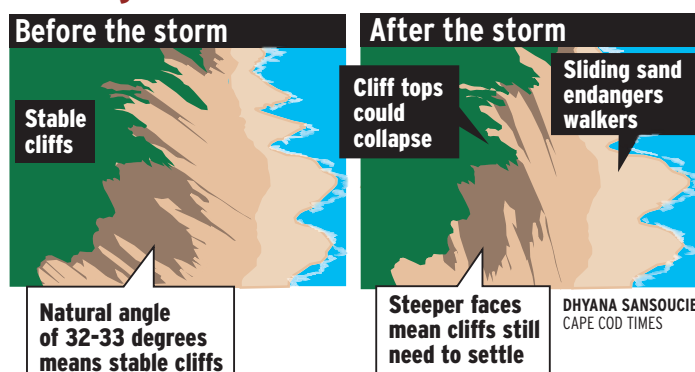
posted by the town's building inspector, restricts use of the cottage until repairs are made. "Second thoughts? No I don't have any second thoughts," Antonio said as he assessed the damage Tuesday. He purchased the property for his children and grandchildren to enjoy.

"These are hard to come by," he said about the oceanfront cottage. From Cape Cod Bay to the Atlantic Ocean beaches, the damage from the weekend storm is still being tallied. But the erosion is not only scarring, it's dangerous. In Sandwich, officials deemed some bayside cottages uninhabitable while farther down Cape, officials struggled with how to keep people off cliffs destabilized by wave action that ate away supporting sand.

"What is surprising is that it was so much (erosion)," said coastal geologist Graham Giese, the director of the Land Sea Interaction Program at the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies. Giese believed the beaches were "thin," without a heavy buildup of sand that would have absorbed a lot of the force of the storm waves and protected the base of coastal dunes.

"A lot of areas were already severely eroded from prior hurricanes, including Sandy, and didn't have a lot of time to recover," said Bob Hamilton, a coastal engineer at the Woods Hole Group, environmental, engineering and scientific consulting group headquartered in Falmouth. With high-velocity sustained winds and gusts up to 70 mph, monitoring buoys showed that waves reached 20 to 25 feet. And then there was the high tide surge, Hamilton said. "Losing 20 feet is pretty significant," he said. Two cottages on Salt Marsh Road in Sandwich were declared uninhabitable by Sandwich building inspector Paul Spiro, including one that lost a huge chunk of its foundation. Pieces of the concrete

Warning: National Seashore cliffs unstable



Stairs destroyed:
Nauset Light Beach, Wellfleet
Marconi Beach, Wellfleet
Thumpertown Beach, Eastham

Parking lots closed:
Brewster bayside lots;
Maguire Landing, Wellfleet

Very steep, unstable cliffs:
White Crest Beach, Wellfleet
Newcomb Hollow Beach, Wellfleet
Cahoon Hollow Beach, Wellfleet



A North Beach cottage in Chatham is left damaged after the weekend storm.

MERRILY CASSIDY/CAPE COD TIMES

declared "unsafe for human occupancy."

All along Salt Marsh Road, stairways to the beach dangled precariously. The town's picturesque boardwalk across Mill Creek is also closed temporarily while town engineers check to see if there's any permanent damage.

At Town Neck Beach in Sandwich, Spiro closed the lone remaining stairway to that beach, a frequent victim of storms. On Tuesday, the parking lot looked more like a beach because of the sand tossed over the dunes by storm waves.

Cape Cod National Seashore Chief Ranger Leslie Reynolds cautioned park visitors that they need to stay far back from the tops of coastal bluffs and also give cliffs a wide berth while walking on the beach in case of a landslide.

In Eastham, a walk along the beach between Coast Guard and Nauset Light on Tuesday revealed trees and bushes complete with sod that had been sloughed off the tops of the bluffs above. The sound of sand sliding down the cliff face was a constant as physics drove the creation of a more stable incline to the beach.

Town officials notified the Cape Cod National Seashore on Tuesday that they want to close a section of Nauset Light Beach Road that runs along the edge of a cliff overlooking the Atlantic and serves two homes. That portion of the road has been severely undercut by sand collapsing onto the beach after waves ravaged the toe of the bluff.

All of the cliff faces along Wellfleet's ocean beaches were scoured by the ocean and are now steep, dangerous and prone to collapse, Beach Administrator Suzanne Grout Thomas said.

The Maguire Landing Beach parking lot was closed because the pavement at the end of the lot was hanging off a nearly vertical cliff face and considered too dangerous to allow driving or walking. But some were not deterred. Someone had rigged a long rope to a fence to "rappel" down the steep embankment leading down to Newcomb Hollow Beach.

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