



The Silent Killer

Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

By Lt. Erica Shipman, Marine Police Division

In June 2002, a family of five visited a lake to enjoy the day and water ski. As the boat idled, one of the parents prepared to ski and was busy putting on a life vest. The couple's two-year-old daughter positioned herself on the back ski platform and began to kick at the water. In less than one minute, she became unconscious and non-responsive.

The victim's father, a doctor, performed rescue breathing until the child began to breathe on her own. Emergency personnel were notified and transported her to the hospital where it was discovered she was suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning. Hospital calculations estimated her carbon monoxide levels were between 50-57 percent after less than one minute of exposure. Her four-year-old brother was also later treated for carbon monoxide poisoning after he began to exhibit symptoms.

Labor Day weekend, 2003, Bruce "Skip" Bauer and his wife, Joyce, decided to take their cabin cruiser out. Skip wanted to go for a long swim, but decided to turn on the generator that ran the refrigerator before he left.

Thirty minutes later, his wife heard him return from his swim and called out to him. When there was no answering response, she came out of the cabin and discovered him hanging by one arm on the back of the boat with his eyes rolled back into his head.

She got into the water and dragged him to shore, where she began mouth to mouth resuscitation, to no avail. Swimming back to the boat, she called 911, but it proved to be too late. Less than two minutes had passed from the time she heard him return, to the time she found him.

An autopsy showed Skip had very high levels of carbon monoxide in his body.

The Silent Killer

Often called the silent killer, carbon monoxide, a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas, is produced when a carbon-based fuel, such as gasoline, propane, charcoal or oil, burns. It mixes with the air and enters the bloodstream through the lungs, displacing the oxygen the body needs to survive.

Most boaters do not realize that carbon monoxide poisoning from boat exhaust causes many deaths each year. Poorly ventilated cabins or enclosed areas, running a generator, or exhaust leaks are the primary causes, especially in older boats. But open motor boats, especially those with ski platforms, are becoming an area of increasing concern to boating officials. Sitting or riding on ski platforms while the boat is idling, teak surfing (a practice where passengers hang onto the rear of the boat, while being pulled through the water), or sitting next to a boat or dock while idling, can all prove to be fatal.

How do you know if you or one of your passengers is suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning? Often, the symptoms are confused with seasickness or intoxication. Some early symptoms include:

- Itchy, watery eyes
- Flushed appearance
- Headache

If someone on the boat complains of these symptoms, move the victim to fresh air, find the source of the carbon monoxide, and take corrective action to stop it. Seek

medical attention if the victim does not appear to get better.

As carbon monoxide levels in the body increase, the symptoms become more severe and may include:

- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Lack of concentration
- Inability to think coherently
- Convulsions
- Death


If you or any of your passengers are suffering from these symptoms, take action. If moving the victim to fresh air and eliminating the source does not appear to help, seek medical attention immediately. Mere minutes can mean the difference between life and death for someone suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning. Always remember, prolonged exposure to low concentrations of carbon monoxide is just as fatal as very short exposure to high concentrations.

Protect Yourself

How can you protect yourself and your passengers from carbon monoxide poisoning? Here are a few tips:

- Educate all passengers on the symptoms and treatment.
- Attach carbon monoxide warning stickers by the ski platform and other exhaust areas.

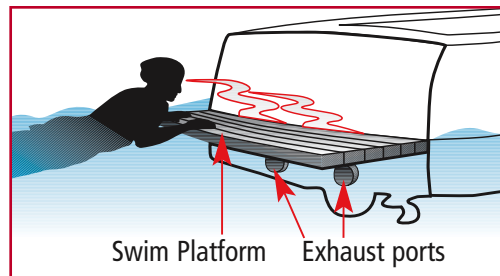
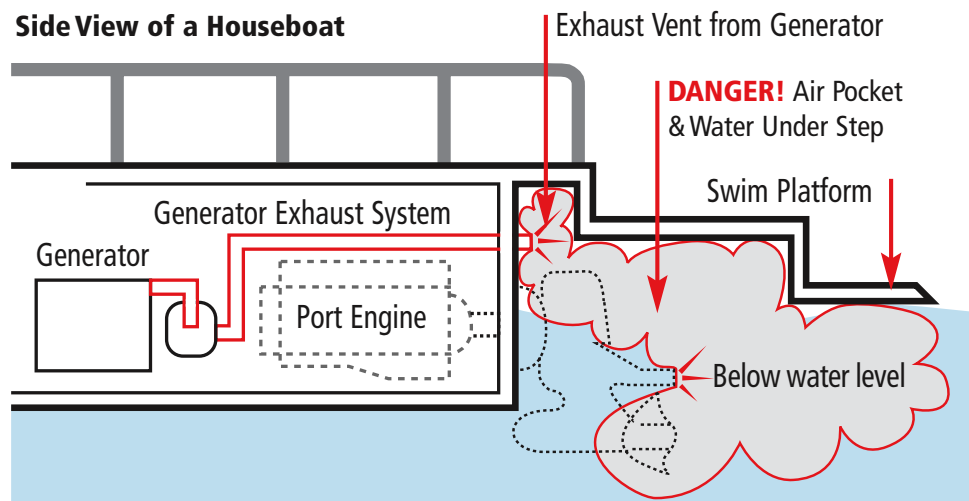
- Assign someone to watch passengers swimming around the boat.
- Do not allow anyone to sit or ride on ski platforms while boat is idling.
- Do not allow teak surfing or water skiing within 20 feet of the moving boat.
- Be aware of other boats in the area that may be running. Stay at least 20 feet away.
- Keep fresh air flowing through the open seating area and any other enclosed areas or cabins.
- Schedule regular engine and exhaust system maintenance checks.
- In between maintenance visits, check hoses and other exhaust systems components for leaks. Replace faulty seals or cracked fittings.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors in cabins or other enclosed areas and test them regularly.

Awareness of the causes and ways to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning can make the difference between a pleasant or a deadly day on the water, and will keep you and your passengers from falling victim to carbon monoxide, the silent killer. 



AVOID THE DEATH ZONES!

Side View of a Houseboat



Carbon monoxide from exhaust pipes can build up inside and outside the boat in areas near exhaust vents. Teak surfing, dragging and water skiing within 20 feet of a moving watercraft can be fatal.