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Health officials urge caution about using vehicles as warming stations

Crews continue to work across West Virginia restoring electricity to homes that have been without power since Tuesday and health officials are reminding residents to use extreme caution when using vehicles as warming stations due to carbon monoxide. Even vehicles with catalytic converters can produce substantial amounts of carbon monoxide if they are left idling in an enclosed space such as a closed garage or if there are exhaust system leaks.

West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Commissioner for Public Health and State Health Officer Dr. Marian Swinker said, "It is imperative that residents understand the dangers carbon monoxide may pose when vehicles are used as warming stations. Sleeping in an automobile where exhaust fumes containing carbon monoxide may enter, can cause serious illness or even death because it is a colorless and odorless gas. The best option for residents needing heat is to utilize a local emergency shelter or stay with other family members while electricity is restored. More than 50 shelters are operational across West Virginia."

The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

To locate active shelters in West Virginia visit www.governor.wv.gov/pages/shelters.aspx or call the local health department or emergency services in your area.