

Providing Great Takeaways: A Fact Sheet to Reduce Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Risk Among Food Truck Vendors

The Challenge

Food trucks present an under-recognized risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can sicken or even kill people. Gas-powered heaters and generators are common sources of carbon monoxide poisoning, especially when used in small, enclosed spaces such as food trucks. However, carbon monoxide is odorless and invisible, which means people can't always tell if they are being poisoned.



Early on a February morning, the Wisconsin Occupational Health and Safety and Surveillance team received an alert from the Wisconsin Poison Control Center regarding a potential work-related carbon monoxide poisoning. A young individual had reported to the hospital feeling nauseated and dizzy after working several hours in a food truck. Although this worker recovered and was released, lab results showed this individual had been exposed to dangerous levels of carbon monoxide.

The Response

Local and state health department staff quickly got information from the affected worker and discovered that this worker had not received proper training on generator use. This poisoning resulted from the employee running a gas-powered generator inside the food truck. This case pointed to a broader potential issue of food truck vendors not knowing the risks associated with generators – though this risk is well known to the occupational health community. While the Wisconsin Department of Health Services had existing carbon monoxide outreach materials, a quick review revealed that none of them addressed this specific group of workers. Food trucks are commonplace in many parts of Wisconsin, suggesting a need for more information for these workers. By way of response, we developed a fact sheet explicitly aimed at safe generator use for food truck vendors.

The Impact

The one-page fact sheet provides information on carbon monoxide poisoning and other generator safety issues specifically aimed at food truck vendors. This fact sheet is designed to be attractive and easily displayed in any food truck, where busy workers can easily see life-saving safety tips. The fact sheet was disseminated to all vendors in the state who have registered for a food truck license as well as through partner organizations and the restaurant association. It immediately received positive feedback from over 100 vendors who indicated they would use it; some of whom spontaneously shared food truck safety stories. The fact sheet was also distributed to the Green Bay Food Truck Coalition ahead of the NFL draft in Green Bay, Wisconsin in April 2025.

View the factsheet at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01561a.pdf>