



## AN ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING STORY

# PREVENTING CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Bayfield County, Wisconsin

## THE PROBLEM

Using their County Environmental Health Profile, Bayfield County Health Department staff identified carbon monoxide as a community concern. In their county, they saw about 15 emergency room visits related to carbon monoxide poisoning per 100,000 people, which is nearly double the Wisconsin average of about eight visits per 100,000 people. Bayfield County is the northernmost county in Wisconsin, and nearly nine in 10 households use some form of combustible heat source.

## WHAT BAYFIELD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DID

Health department staff worked with a company that makes carbon monoxide detectors to purchase them at a discounted bulk rate. Along with the detectors, staff created carbon monoxide safety kits that included a checklist on carbon monoxide poisoning prevention, a handout on safe generator use, and a card that listed the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Staff developed a traveling display board and attended events for hunters and anglers who commonly use generators to heat cabins, deer stands, and ice shanties. Staff partnered with their WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), Meals on Wheels, and home visitor programs to distribute detectors and safety kits to low-income families and seniors who didn't already have them. To assess residents' awareness and understanding of carbon monoxide prevention, they developed and promoted an online survey. Staff used the survey results to frame social media posts, press releases, and earned media articles.

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Bayfield staff members have already heard of two instances where the detectors they distributed saved lives. One WIC client had a detector in her home but not one outside of where her family slept. Staff sent her home with one. A few months later, she contacted the WIC clinic to share that the detector they provided went off in the middle of the night. The emergency responders said that without it, her family of five would not have survived. Staff also gave a detector to the owner of a bed and breakfast, who similarly reported back a few months later that his detector went off and he was able to get out safely because of it.

In total, Bayfield County Health Department staff distributed 300 carbon monoxide detectors, some of which were personally installed by home visitor staff. Staff also reported building stronger relationships with community partners and generating considerable engagement and awareness as their project progressed.

EXPLORE CARBON MONOXIDE  
DATA:

[dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht)

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Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health

[dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/epht) | OCTOBER 2018 | [dhstracking@wi.gov](mailto:dhstracking@wi.gov)  
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