



6<sup>th</sup> February 2013

## **Danger of death and poisoning from charcoal briquettes**

Carbon monoxide poisoning from burning barbecue coals or charcoal briquettes indoors was the reason for 46 cases reported to the NSW Poisons Information Centre between 2004-2012. Half have occurred in the past two years.

“Carbon monoxide is a colourless and odourless gas, which can be toxic and poisoning most commonly occurs in enclosed spaces” said Jared Brown, Senior Poisons Specialist at The NSW Poisons Information Centre, The Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

“Symptoms are non-specific, starting with headache, nausea, vomiting and dizziness and can progress to loss of consciousness.”

The Medical Journal of Australia has published the results of a study by Jared Brown, and Professor Nick Buckley, Clinical Toxicologist, NSW Poisons Information Centre, The Children’s Hospital at Westmead and The University of New South Wales.

The authors found the age of those involved varied from infants to the elderly and often involved multiple members of a household. All but one needed to be hospitalised and 8 had lost consciousness. Most incidents occurred in winter when charcoal was burnt inside at night for heat, most often in barbecues. Most instances reported occurred in NSW, with the remaining in Vic, Qld, and SA.

Despite the coroner’s recommendation in 2010 that all barbecue charcoal briquettes carry a warning, the study shows that the number of incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning from these has not reduced.

“Stronger warnings and education campaigns of the dangers of burning barbecue coals, briquettes or charcoal indoors are needed”, said Mr Brown. “If you suspect someone may have been exposed, contact the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26.”

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