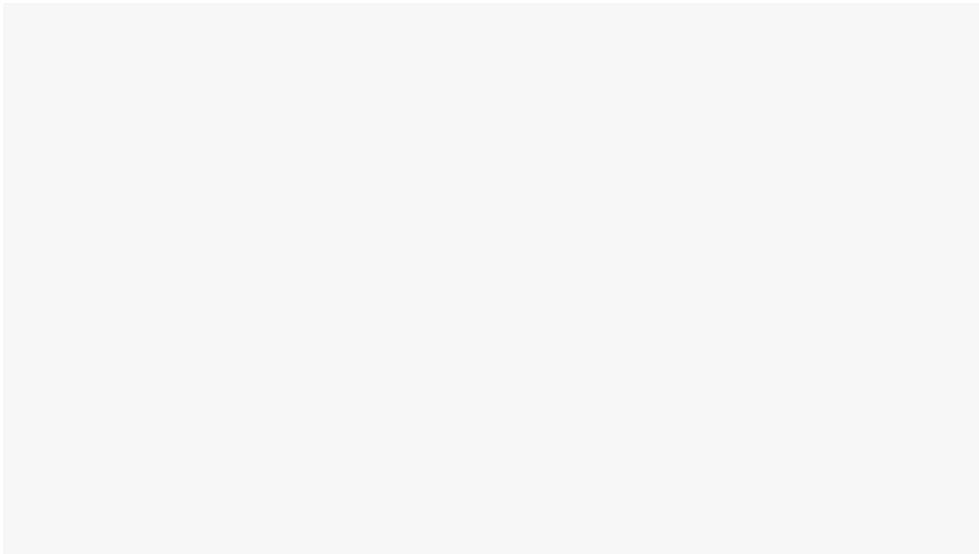


• How generator fumes kill Nigerians silently

17th September 2019 in

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Tessy Igomu

In one fell swoop, a family of seven and a pregnant guest were killed in their sleep in Lagos. The suspected cause was carbon monoxide from a generator positioned behind the window of their one-room apartment.

For those that thronged 19, Olowora Street, Mafoluku, Oshodi, where the incident took place, to authenticate the story, the Tuesday, September 4, incident was just too bizarre. Several could not comprehend how “ordinary” generator fumes could kill seamlessly.

Over the years, the number of Nigerians killed through inhalation of poisonous fumes from electricity generating sets can be better imagined. Daily, the number continues to swell as heart-rending stories continue to unfold, causing unfathomable pain for families.

In the face of these avoidable deaths, safety and security experts continue to sensitise on the need for people not to leave generators on overnight or to keep them far from the house. They stress that safety should supersede comfort, adding that generator fumes could kill slowly or instantly, as several deaths could be traced to inhalation of fumes over time.

For many critics, this remains another side of the adversity that the country's inability to generate and transmit enough electricity constitutes against the citizens.

Reports showed that between June 2018 and June 2019, generator fumes killed no fewer than 30 people in the country.

This latest incident is not the first time poisonous generator fumes would wipe out a whole family. Several of such gory tales have been reported across the country.

In July 2018, seven members of a family were discovered dead inside their one-bedroom apartment in Big Elele, Rivers State. They reportedly slept off in the sitting room watching television, while their generator was on.

Mokwa in Niger State also witnessed the death of five members of a family of eight from inhaling carbon monoxide poisoning. Date was October 25, 2018.

On June 25, 2018, in Benin, Edo State, Pastor Ugochukwu Ike lost his wife and five children. They were said to have left a generator on in their kitchen and were killed by the fumes.

Still in Edo State, the children of Mr. Tochukwu Okwueze were found dead in their home at Akpata Street, Egor Local Government

Area, by neighbours on Tuesday, June 19, 2018.

Edo State also recorded another incident on First Ihogbe Road, Benin City in January, 2009. A family of six was killed by carbon monoxide poisoning.

On August 16, 2018, five members of a family of six in Igboetche community, Rivers State, were killed by generator fumes. The family, it was learnt, had put on their generator and left it in the bathroom before going to bed.

The year 2018, ended on a rather terrible note for a mother and her four children as they died at the Obafemi Awolowo Teaching hospital, Ile-Ife, after they inhaled generator fumes.

The body of a 50-year-old widow, Aishat Mohammed Idris and her three children, Gaddafi, 22, Usalaman, 16 and eight-year-old Yusuf, were found dead in their apartment at 4, Adeigbe Street, Igbogbo, Ikorodu, Lagos State on Saturday, May 6, 2017. The victims, said to hail from Kura Local Government Area of Kano State, died in their sleep from generator fumes.

Similar tragedy also struck in the Itamaga area of Ikorodu, Lagos on October 1, 2018, as five members of a family were also found dead in their home.

Years back, the President, Good Governance Initiative, GGI, Mr. Festus Mbisiogu, said that at the last count, no fewer than 10,000 Nigerians have over the years died from poisonous generator fumes, especially between 2008 and 2014. He called on the federal government to urgently take steps to curb the trend.

He suggested that the Nigerian government should make it a point of priority to design a progressive model to achieve uninterrupted power generation in the country.

Carbon monoxide, an odourless, colourless toxic gas produced when fuel containing carbon is burned where there is little oxygen, has been a four-legged monster on the prowl in the country. A monster unleashed in the form of generating sets by the ineptitude of past administrations in the country to stabilise the power sector.

Since the invention of electricity by the legendary Michael Faraway, it has turned to be a crucial force in man's daily existence. While leaders of other countries seek to maximize their potentials by seeking ways to sustain and possibly improve on its power sector,

Electricity remains one basic amenity that is inadequate, irregular and non-existent in some parts of the country. Aside being the country's biggest headache, it remains a forlorn dream that has made citizens embrace a 'reliable' source of power supply: generators. Most people have resigned themselves to fate and view electrical appliances in their homes as merely for aesthetic effects.

Nigeria has been rated as one of the world's largest importers of generators.

Many social critics aver that now than ever, the importance of reliable power supply cannot be over emphasized. They stressed that the dream of attaining rapid economic growth is almost becoming unrealistic as several medium and large-scale industries keep shutting down daily; while those still in partial operation now pass the high cost of

production to hapless consumers. nMany Nigerians lament that investors have become sceptical about putting their money into an economy that barely survives on poor power supply.

Between 1999 and 2007 under President Olusegun Obasanjo administration, over \$24.4 billion was allegedly spent on the power sector. Many still wonder how such amount of money could have been sunk into the power sector and the country still wallows in perennial darkness.

In the face of the failure to provide this basic infrastructure, and in a bid to escape from the torment of heat waves in the night, people purchase cheap, substandard generating sets that slowly and silently kill them while they are taking a rest from the day's labour.

Many aver that with no possible time frame or solution out of the logjam created by inconsistent power supply to some areas, the debilitating effect would continue to be socio-economic underdevelopment, untimely death from asphyxiation, loss of property and falling years of life expectancy.

Aside inestimable loss accrued from generating sets, they provide the antithesis of the relative peace and comfort they are meant to give. Insomnia, eye problems, hearing defects and headaches are also side effects of the noisy drone and black smoke belching from the equipment.

Irrked by the many death that the electricity malaise has caused, the weighty question that has remained on the lips of worried Nigerians is, when will the shadow of death stop stalking in the dark?