

## **Fumes give family a scare**

Teenager hospitalized after being overcome by emissions from gas-powered generator

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An Altamont family that fell behind on its utility bill nearly lost a son this weekend after a generator malfunctioned, filling their home with toxic fumes.

Authorities offered few details Saturday, but the family agreed to a telephone interview with the Times Union in the hopes that others could avoid their nightmare.

Shortly after 11 p.m. Friday, 15-year-old Kurtis Palmer collapsed on the living room floor of the home he shares with his parents and older brother at 993 Altamont Blvd. in Altamont.

Kurtis recalls playing a video game with a friend before everything went dark. After a few minutes, the friend stood up and complained of feeling ill.

"He left, and then when I went to go get up, I felt lightheaded," Kurtis said in a telephone interview. "So I went upstairs and told my parents."

There, his father, George Palmer, was watching television with his wife, Vivian Palmer. Their utility payment had lapsed, and a gasoline generator in the basement was powering the home. When the lights started to flicker, the father said, "We had an idea something was wrong."

George Palmer summoned his other son, Jason, 21. Together, they headed downstairs to put the generator outside because "it was starting to make some crazy noise," he said.

As they stepped outside, Kurtis fell to the floor.

"We dragged him to the door," the father said. Kurtis was unconscious. They screamed for help and dialed 911. None of them knew CPR, but they tried anyway.

"I did the best I could. I gave him mouth-to-mouth, put his arms

under his head," he said. "It was a nightmare."

Paramedics loaded Kurtis into the ambulance as police and firefighters tended to the scene. As the emergency vehicle screamed toward Albany Medical Center Hospital, Kurtis said he awoke to a comforting sight: "One of the cops saying 'You're not in trouble.' "

By Saturday afternoon, Kurtis was anxious to resume the normal life of a teenager, spending time with friends and mastering his skills on the PlayStation 2.

But he was feeling a bit drowsy and lightheaded. Personnel at Westchester Medical Center, where he was taken for further treatment, told the teenager that he needed to undergo a few more rounds in the hyperbaric chamber to purge his system of carbon monoxide, the toxic gas that nearly killed him.

"He's a big guy," said Dawn Salka, a veteran nurse who has been a manager at the hospital's hyperbaric unit for two years. Kurtis stands about 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighs 200 pounds. "He would've been dead because his (carbon monoxide) level was so high."

Statistics show that from 2001 to 2003, approximately 480 Americans died from carbon monoxide poisoning. An estimated 15,200 people were treated annually in hospital emergency rooms for carbon monoxide poisoning, according to a January report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Salka said Kurtis is expected to make a full recovery.

"He's doing really good right now, excellent," George Palmer said. "Excellent."

