

Generator Dangers

Portable generators are useful when you need temporary electric power, but they also can be dangerous. The primary dangers to avoid when using a generator are carbon monoxide poisoning from the engine exhaust, electric shock and fire.

Generators: Dangers from Carbon Monoxide

- Never use a generator in enclosed or partially-enclosed spaces, including in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces and other enclosed or partially-enclosed areas – even with ventilation. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent carbon monoxide build-up in your home. Put the generator outdoors and away from doors, windows and vents that could allow carbon monoxide to come indoors.
- Generators can produce deadly levels of carbon monoxide very quickly. When you use a portable generator, remember that you cannot smell or see carbon monoxide.
- If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air immediately. The carbon monoxide from generators can rapidly lead to serious illness and even death.
- If you experience serious symptoms, get medical attention immediately. Be sure to let the medical staff that you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you had symptoms while indoors, have someone call the fire department to determine when it is safe to re-enter the building.
- Follow the instructions that come with your generator.
- Install battery-operated carbon monoxide alarms or plug-in carbon monoxide alarms with battery back-up in your home, according to the manufacturer's installation instructions. Test your carbon monoxide alarms frequently and replace dead batteries.

Generators: Electrical Hazards

Follow these tips to protect against shock and electrocution:

- Keep the generator dry and do not use it in rain or wet conditions. To protect from moisture, operate it on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure. If your hands are wet, dry them before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator. Or use a heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cord that is rated (in watts or amps) at least equal to the sum of the connected appliance loads. Check that the entire cord is free of cuts or tears and that the plug has all three prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- Never try to power your home by plugging the generator into a wall outlet – an unsafe practice known as “back-feeding.” This extremely dangerous practice creates an electrocution risk to utility workers and neighbors served by the same utility transformer.
- For power outages, permanently installed generators are better for providing back-up power to your home. A properly connected portable generator can become overloaded. This may result in overheating, possibly leading to generator failure.

Generators: Fire Hazards

Follow these tips to prevent fires:

- Never store fuel for your generator in your home. Store gasoline, propane, kerosene and other flammable liquids outside of living areas in properly-labeled, non-glass safety containers.
- Do not store fuel near a fuel-burning appliance, such as a natural gas water heater in a garage.
- If fuel is spilled or the container is not sealed properly, invisible vapors can travel along the ground and then can be ignited by the appliance's pilot light or by arcs from electric switches in the appliance.
- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool down. Gasoline spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.

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