

Safely Use a Portable Generator

Storms can disrupt the flow of electrical power to your home or business. In recent years people increasingly have bought backup generators to provide temporary power during such outages.

But portable generators can be dangerous if they're not used properly. The two main hazards are carbon monoxide poisoning from exhaust fumes and electrocution.

Generators are a great help to our members. But they are dangerous when improperly installed. Here are tips for safely choosing, installing and operating a generator.

Choosing a generator

- Determine the “constant” or “run” wattage you need a generator to provide. A generator will operate a limited number of appliances and lights. Decide what items you need most and add up their total wattage; that’s the “constant” or “run” wattage.
- Determine the “start-up” wattage. Refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners and furnace blowers require up to three times their normal, constant wattage to start. Choose a generator that has a surge rating that meets or exceeds your “start-up” wattage needs, too.
- Compare the generator’s voltage ratings with those of the appliances to which you want to provide power. Portable generators may be rated for 120 volts only-or for a combination of 120 and 240 volts. Most household appliances are rated at 120 volts, but some larger appliances may require 240 volts.

The law requires a transfer switch, a manual or an automatic switch that creates a visible opening when the generator kicks on and separates the generator from our line and keeps it from backfeeding. For your safety and ours, please be sure to operate your generator properly. Make sure your generator has the required transfer switch.

Installing a generator

- Never install a portable generator indoors-not even in a garage. Its exhaust fumes could kill you.
- Buy a carbon monoxide alarm. If the exhaust fumes do somehow seep into your building, the alarm will warn you.