Generator Safety

Prevent Fires, CO Poisoning and Electrocution



Generators can be helpful when the power goes out for an extended period of time. It is important to know how use them safely to prevent fires, carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, and electrocution.

Purchasing and Preparing to Use a Generator

- Purchase one that is approved by a nationally recognized testing agency such as Underwriter's Laboratory (UL).
- Have a licensed electrician install a transfer switch. Connecting a generator directly to your home's electrical system without a properly installed transfer switch could electrocute utility workers.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Be sure to read the instructions before you need to use the generator.
- Install working CO alarms on every level of the home.

Using a Generator Safely

- Put the generator outdoors facing away from doors, windows, and vents. Never use a generator inside a house, basement, or crawl space – not even in a garage with the door open. When possible, place the generator 5-10 feet away from the house.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator or use heavy-duty, outdoor rated extension cords, not to exceed the number of outlets on the generator. Make sure cords are free of cuts and tears and have all three prongs – including the grounding pin.
- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open canopy or tent.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Let the generator cool before refueling. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts can ignite.

Safely Storing and Transporting Gasoline to Power a Generator

- Transport gasoline safely, standing upright, in an approved container in the trunk of your car or back of a pick-up truck. You can transport a maximum of 21 gallons without a permit from the fire department, provided no single container exceeds 7 gallons.
- Never store gasoline inside a house or an attached garage. Store it in a shed or detached garage away from the house. Secure the shed or garage if possible, and keep flammable liquids out of reach of children.
- Store gasoline far from any fuel burning appliance such as a furnace, water heater or woodstove. Vapors can travel back to their ignition source and ignite.

Never use a generator inside a house, basement or crawl space.

Department of Fire Services
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