

Portable Generator Safety

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC):

- From 1999 to 2010, nearly 600 generator-related carbon monoxide (CO) deaths have been reported to the CPSC.
- CO poisoning from generator use causes an annual average of 81 deaths. The majority of the deaths occurred as a result of using a generator inside a home's living space, in the basement or in the garage.
- One generator produces as much CO as hundreds of cars. CO from a generator is deadly and can incapacitate and kill you within minutes.

Portable generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed, but they can be hazardous. The primary hazards to avoid when using them are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock or electrocution, and fire.

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from improper use of portable generators.

To Avoid Carbon Monoxide Hazards:

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- NEVER use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Test CO alarms often and replace batteries when needed.

To Avoid Electrical Hazards:

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the entire extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- NEVER plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment. Or, your utility company may be able to install an appropriate transfer switch.

To Avoid Fire Hazards:

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.
- Always store fuel outside of living areas in properly labeled, non-glass containers.
- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.