

Generator Safety



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The misuse of a portable generator following a storm can easily kill or sicken storm survivors. That misuse can also knock out more electric power as utility workers work to get the lights back on.

Following Hurricane Katrina, there were five deaths and 46 cases of carbon monoxide poisoning reported in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Never use a generator indoors or in an attached garage.

■ A portable generator is an internal combustion engine that exhausts a deadly gas called carbon monoxide or CO₂. CO₂ is odorless and colorless, and you can be overcome if the generator is indoors.

■ Be sure to place the generator outside where exhaust fumes will not enter into enclosed spaces. Only operate a generator outdoors in a well-ventilated, dry area, away from air intakes to the home. The generator should be protected from direct exposure to rain and snow.

Don't connect your generator directly to your home's wiring.

■ Connecting a portable generator directly to your household wiring can be deadly. A generator that is directly connected to your home's wiring can "back feed" into the power lines connected to your home.

■ Utility transformers can then increase this lower electric voltage to thousands of volts. That's more than enough to kill a utility lineman making outage repairs many miles away. You could also cause expensive damage to utility equipment and your generator.

■ If you wish to hardwire a generator to your home it should be installed by a licensed electrician with an approved double-throw cutoff switch that will automatically disconnect the home from the power grid when the generator is being used.

Don't plug a portable generator into an electric outlet in your home or garage.

■ If a generator is plugged into your home's electrical circuits, it can still "back feed" power into the utility company lines, which can injure or kill utility workers fixing the downed power lines.

■ The correct way to use a generator is to connect a heavy-duty, outdoor rated power cord to the generator. Appliances can then be connected to the power cord.

■ Make sure that the outdoor-rated power cord has a sufficient wire gauge to handle the electric load.

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Don't overload the generator.

- All generators have a power rating. They should be used only when necessary and only to power a limited number of appliances or equipment.
- The total wattage used by the appliance should be less than the output rating of the generator. If you put too many appliances on the generator, it could seriously damage the appliances and electronics. Overloading the generator could also cause fires in the power cord.

Make sure your generator is properly grounded to avoid electrical shocks.

- ☑ Check the generator owner's manual for correct grounding information.

Do not store gasoline for the portable generator indoors.

- Gasoline should be stored in approved, safety containers. Do not use glass containers.
- Don't store gasoline in a garage if there's a water heater or fuel-burning appliance in the garage. Vapor from gasoline is heavier than air and can travel invisibly along the floor. It could be ignited by a pilot light or other source of flame, such as an electric spark.
- Extinguish all flames or cigarettes when handling gasoline or the generator.
- Shut off the generator before refueling. Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
- Always have a fully charged, approved fire extinguisher located near the generator.

Read and adhere to manufacturer's directions for safe operation.

- Read the owner's manual before you operate the generator. If you've lost the manual contact the manufacturer for another copy. You can often download the manual from the manufacturer's website. Keep the owner's manual with the generator in a plastic zip lock bag to keep it dry.

Final Tips:

- Many generator parts are hot enough to burn you during operation. Stay away from the muffler and other hot areas.
- Keep children away from portable electric generators at all times.

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If you need further information please contact Operations at Sangre de Cristo Electric at (719) 395-2412 or (800) 933-3823.