

# How to Use a Generator Safely After a Hurricane

## 5 tips for using portable generators safely



Ensure that the generator is at least 30 feet away from the home and any openings into the home.



Only operate generators in dry areas away from rain or floodwaters.



Gasoline and other fuel containers should be stored away from the generator and other objects that emit heat or flames.



Never plug a generator directly into your home's power outlets. This can electrocute you and the utility workers attempting to restore power.



Be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms, which include dizziness, unconsciousness, nausea and vomiting.

In the event of an extended power outage, particularly following hurricanes and other severe weather, having a generator at home can be a huge advantage. But if used improperly, the devices can seriously harm or even kill unsuspecting families.

Carbon monoxide poisoning, electrocution and fire are all potentially fatal risks of misusing portable generators.

**Carbon monoxide poisoning** - Portable generators produce as much carbon monoxide as hundreds of cars and can kill a person within minutes, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Carbon monoxide poisoning sends more than 20,000 to the emergency room each year, according to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). This is why generators should never be operated anywhere inside a home, including in garages or basements.

When using a portable generator, it needs to be a minimum of 30 feet away from the house while it's running to eliminate the possibilities of carbon monoxide poisoning. Even 15 feet away is not enough distance, as wind can blow the odorless, colorless and tasteless gas indoors.

The CPSC stated that generators should be operated in dry areas and kept away from windows, doors and any other openings into the home. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommended placing the generator in an area where it has 3 to 4 feet of clear space on all sides to ensure proper ventilation.

Quickly recognizing the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can mean the difference between life and death. These include dizziness, blurred vision, loss of consciousness, shortness of breath and nausea and vomiting, according to the Mayo Clinic. People experiencing any symptoms should get to a place with fresh air immediately and seek professional medical help.

The Pembroke Pines Fire Department recommends that a carbon monoxide alarm/detector be placed on every floor of the home and also outside of every sleeping area.

**Electrical shock and electrocution** - The risk of electrical shock or electrocution while using a generator can be high following severe weather, especially when flooding is a factor. Using a generator isn't advised if floodwaters have entered a home. Turn the main breaker off if power is still in the house.

People operating generators should avoid backfeeding their homes, which means to connect the generator to power outlets inside the home. Not only is it illegal, but it can have dire consequences for people both inside and outside the house.

**Fire dangers** -- Generators and their fuel can cause fires if not handled properly. The devices heat up while running and can take a long while to cool down even after they are turned off. Allow the generator to cool before refueling and never refuel while it is still operating. Gasoline and other fuel containers should be kept away from the generator, water heaters, cigarettes and lighters. The fuels should not be stored inside the home and should be kept away from living areas. Fuel spills should also be carefully avoided, as fuels can ignite when spilled on the generator's hot parts.