



Disaster

readiness - response - recovery

Proper care with generators can protect life, property

When electric power service is out due to a major storm, many people turn to gasoline-powered generators to run household appliances. Knowing how to use generators safely is important to protect life and property.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension advises those using generators to be sure to operate them in well-ventilated, covered, unheated areas.

Generators should not be operated in a basement, attached garage or other closed area. Exhaust fumes contain carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless gas. Be aware of the effects that may be caused by carbon-monoxide, including drowsiness, headache and disorientation.

When purchasing a portable generator, keep in mind that they come in different sizes and have different features. Have a licensed electrician determine your power needs and match those with the power output of the generator you select.

Here are some practical options:

- an overhead valve engine for longer life and quieter operation
- an automatic idle control to reduce noise and fuel consumption
- a large gas tank (A five-to-10 gallon tank may last only 5 to 10 hours.)

- a low oil shutdown feature to prevent engine damage
- a wheel kit for easy transport.

It is also helpful to have a manual or automatic switch to disconnect the generator from the home's main power lines. Without this, use the main switch on your electric service panel to cut the power to your home.

Generators are usually used to run plug-in appliances such as refrigerators, freezers and lights. Any appliance not permanently wired to the electrical system can be operated with polarized extension cords from the generator. Overloaded extension cords can cause fire.

If a generator is wired into a service box for running 240-volt or hard-wire appliances like furnaces or air conditioners, it is important to have a manual double-throw transfer switch on the service box or generator.

The transfer switch prevents the generator from back-feeding electricity into the power lines and possibly causing injury or death to unsuspecting utility workers trying to restore power.

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