Downed utility lines, power company blackouts, heavy snow falls or summer storms can all lead to power outages. 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, electrical shock or electrocution, and fire. Carbon Monoxide is a colorless, odorless toxic gas. Symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, confusion, chest pains and disorientation.

Avoiding Fire Hazards...

- Before refueling a generator - always turn off the generator and let it cool down. Fuel spilled on a hot engine part(s) could ignite.
- Always store fuel for the generator in a non-glass container that is intended for the purpose and is correctly labeled as such.
- Always store the container(s) outside of living areas and away from any fuel burning appliance.
- Maintain at least a 20' clearance between the generator and your house.
- All generators have a power rating and are intended to power a limited number of appliances/equipment.
- The total wattage used by the appliances should not exceed the output rating of the generator.
- Overloading the generator could cause a fire in the power cord.

Avoiding Electrical Hazards...

- When plugging in appliances, make sure they are plugged directly into the generator or a heavy duty outdoor-rated extension cord. The cords should be checked for cuts, tears and that the plug has all three prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- Keep the generator dry. Operate the generator on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- If necessary to connect the generator to the house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment in accordance with the National Electrical Code (NEC) and all applicable state and local electrical codes. OR your utility company may be able to install a transfer switch.
- NEVER plug the generator into a house wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.

Avoiding Carbon Monoxide Hazards...

- Generators should always be used in well ventilated locations outside away from all doors, windows, and vent openings.
- Never use a generator in an attached garage even with the door open.
- Never use a generator in a home, basement, crawl spaces or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Place generators so that exhaust fumes cannot enter the home through windows, doors or other openings in the building.
- Make sure to install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery back-up) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for correct placement and mounting height.
- Test CO detectors per manufacturer’s recommendations & replace batteries when needed.

FACTS

The Consumer Products Safety Commission reports that from 1999 to 2010, nearly 690 generator-related carbon monoxide deaths have been reported to the commission.

Super Storm Sandy resulted in at least 9 known fatalities directly related to Carbon Monoxide poisoning, due to the improper operation of a generator.

CO poisoning from generator use causes over 80 fatalities annually. Most of these fatalities occurred as a result of using a generator inside a home’s living space, basement or garage.

A single generator can produce as much CO as several hundred cars. Carbon Monoxide from a generator is lethal and can incapacitate a person within minutes.

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina resulted in 5 fatalities due to the improper use of a generator.