



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

SCOTT'S ENERGY SPOT: GENERATORS

Tips from Firelands Electric's energy advisor

On a recent road trip, I noticed a billboard from the Emergency Management Association that had the cast of the cult classic movie "Zombieland" staring down at me with the caption, "Be prepared, have a plan." While this tip may not be helpful during a zombie apocalypse, being prepared to safely operate a portable or whole-house generator during a power outage is always good advice. So, let's take a few minutes to review generator maintenance, operation, and safety procedures — before an emergency occurs.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the greatest danger when operating a portable generator is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas that can cause death in as little as five minutes at certain levels. Data from the CPSC showed that between 2011 and 2021, 770 people in the U.S. died of CO poisoning while using portable generators. In 2024, that number reached 92.

With that being said, the No. 1 rule for generator safety is to NEVER operate any generator in an enclosed space, including an attached garage with the overhead door open or an enclosed porch or patio. Always place the generator at least 20 feet away from the home with the engine exhaust pointed away from windows or doors. If you need to protect your unit from the rain or snow (remember — water and electricity don't mix!), use a ventilated canopy or enclosure specifically designed for generators. You can find them at many home improvement stores and online.



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Some of the newer portable generators do have built-in safety monitors that will shut the unit off if elevated levels of CO are detected in an enclosed space. However, for other models, and for members that have older generators, battery-operated CO detectors should be installed throughout the home to alert occupants of elevated levels of the gas.

Before refueling, shut off your generator and let it cool for at least 20 minutes. Make sure to have a supply of extra fuel and store it properly in an ANSI-approved container in a well-ventilated area and away from any heat source. Adding a fuel stabilizer to your stored supply will help prevent it from degrading over time.

For homes equipped with a standby generator, make sure the area around the unit is free from shrubbery and landscaping,

