



**State of West Virginia
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety**

Sterling Lewis, Jr.
State Fire Marshal

Earl Ray Tomblin, Governor

Phone: (304) 558-2191
Fax: (304) 558-2537

STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

1207 Quarrier St, 2nd Floor
Charleston, WV 25301

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Contact: Carol Nolte, Public Education Division
Phone: 304-558-2191, Ext. 53223
E-mail: Carol.E.Nolte@wv.gov

Generator Safety

About 3,500 Americans die each year and around 18,300 are injured—in what are for the most part FIRES THAT COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED. Many of these fires occur during the colder weather, when people are indoors more and power outages are more frequent.

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 (CO) poisoning, electric shock or electrocution, and fire.

Here are some simple steps from the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) that you can take to prevent loss of life and property resulting from improper use of portable generators.

Avoid Carbon Monoxide Hazards:

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- NEVER use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Install and maintain battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide alarms in your home, following manufacturer's instructions.

Avoid Electrical Hazards:

- Keep the generator—and your hands—dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy- like structure.
- Plug appliances directly into the generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- NEVER plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as backfeeding, can cause a fatal electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect a generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment. Or, your utility company may be able to install an appropriate transfer switch.

Avoid Fire Hazards:

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.
- Always store fuel outside of living areas in properly labeled, non-glass containers.
- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.
- If you must connect a generator to house wiring, have an electrician add the appropriate equipment. Your utility company may be able to put in an appropriate transfer switch as well.

Be Prepared For A Fire:

- One of the best ways to protect yourself and your family is to have working smoke alarms that can sound fast for both a fire that has flames, and a smoky fire that has fumes without flames. It is called a "Dual Sensor Smoke Alarm." **Smoke alarms—and especially residential fire sprinklers--greatly reduce your chances of dying in a fire.**
- Prepare an escape plan and practice it often. Make sure everyone in your family knows at least two (2) escape routes from each room.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on fire prevention, check out the following websites:

www.usfa.fema.gov www.nfpa.org www.homesafetycouncil.org www.homefiresprinkler.org

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