

Portable Generator Safety



In the event your household experiences temporary or remote electric power outages that require the use of a portable generator, it is important to remember the associated hazards. For example, one of the primary hazards connected with portable generator use is carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, electric shock, and fire. Consider the following safety tips to avoid loss of life, injury and/or costly property damage:

Avoiding CO Exposure

Last year, there were 703 carbon monoxide exposure-related incidents recorded in the 2006 Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System. Sadly, many of these incidents could have been prevented. Here is how you can prevent CO exposure:

- Always use generators outdoors in well ventilated areas away from windows and vents.
- Never use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or any other enclosed area, even with ventilation.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery back-up) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home.
- Test CO alarms regularly and replace batteries when needed.

Avoiding Electrical Mishaps

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a surface under an open canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the entire extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all three prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- Never plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as back feeding, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If your only option is to connect the generator to house wiring to power appliances, make sure you have a qualified electrician install the appropriate equipment.

Avoiding 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.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS

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