

As Winter Storm Moves Across the Country, FEMA Offers Important Tips to Ensure Safety When Using Generators

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WASHINGTON, D.C.-- As the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) continues monitoring the winter storm currently moving across the country and coordinating with our state and local partners, FEMA is also reminding people to practice safety measures when using portable generators. The winter storm has the potential to knock out power for prolonged periods of time, and generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed - but can also be extremely hazardous and even life threatening. Potential hazards when using a generator include carbon monoxide poisoning from the toxic engine exhaust, and electrical, fire and noise hazards.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), carbon monoxide exposure kills hundreds of people every year and thousands more are treated in hospitals for exposure. Deaths occur more often during the winter and the death rate is highest among seniors, possibly because the population is at higher risk for undetected exposure. To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Never use a generator indoors or in enclosed spaces such as garages, crawl spaces and basements.
- Make sure a generator has three to four feet of clear space on all sides and above it to ensure adequate ventilation.
- Be cautious when using a generator outdoors to ensure it is not placed near doors, windows and vents, which could allow carbon monoxide poisoning to enter and build up in occupied spaces.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, nauseous, disoriented, losing muscle control or short of breath. Do not re-enter the area until it is determined to be safe by trained and properly equipped personnel.
- Visit the [Center for Disease Control website](#) for more information on carbon monoxide poisoning and prevention.

Generators, when not handled properly, can create electrical and fire hazards. To avoid electrical hazards:

- Keep a generator dry; do not use it in the rain or in wet conditions. If needed, protect a generator with a canopy.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Use ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), especially around wet or damp locations. Extension cords with built-in GFCIs can be purchased at locations that sell electrical equipment.
- Do not use electrical equipment that has been submerged in water. Do not use any equipment that has strange odors or begins smoking.
- Always plug electrical appliances directly into the generator using the manufacturer's supplied cords or extension cords that are grounded (3-pronged). Inspect the cord to make sure they are fully intact and not damaged. Never use frayed or damaged extension cords.

- Never attach a generator directly to the electrical system of a structure (home, office, trailer, etc.) unless a qualified electrician has properly installed the generator with a transfer switch.

Generators become hot while running and remain hot for long periods after they are stopped. Generator fuels (gasoline, kerosene, etc.) can ignite when spilled on hot engine parts. To avoid these fire hazards:

- Fuel spilled on a hot engine can ignite so before refueling, turn off the generator and let it cool.
- Gasoline and other generator fuels should be stored and transported in approved containers that are properly designed and marked for their contents, and vented.
- Keep fuel containers away from flame-producing and heat-generating devices (such as the generator itself, water heaters, cigarettes, lighters and matches). Do not smoke around fuel containers.

Generator engines vibrate and create noise. Excessive noise and vibration could cause hearing loss and fatigue that may affect job performance. To avoid these hazards:

- Keep portable generators as far away as possible from work areas and gathering spaces.
- Wear hearing protection if this is not possible.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

Link to FEMA Info:

<http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=53647>