



Portable generators are internal combustion engines used to generate electricity and are commonly used during disaster response. Portable generators can be dangerous if used incorrectly.

Major Causes of Injuries and Fatalities

- Shocks and electrocution from improper use of power or accidentally energizing other electrical systems.
- Carbon monoxide from a generator's exhaust.
- Fires from improperly refueling the generator or inappropriately storing fuel.

Safe Work Practices

- Inspect portable generators for damage or loose fuel lines that may have occurred during transportation and/or handling.
- Keep the generator dry.
- Maintain and operate portable generators in accordance with the manufacturer's use and safety instructions.
- Never attach a generator directly to the electrical system of a structure (home, office or trailer) unless the generator has a properly installed transfer switch because this creates a risk of electrocution for utility workers.
- Use ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) per the manufacturer's instructions.

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- Always plug electrical appliances directly into the generator using the manufacturer's supplied cords. Use undamaged, heavy-duty, grounded (three-pronged) extension cords.
- Before refueling, shut down the generator. Never store fuel indoors.

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, toxic gas. Many people have died from CO poisoning because their generators were not adequately ventilated.

- Never use a generator indoors.
- Never place a generator outdoors near doors, windows or vents.
- If you or others show symptoms of CO poisoning—dizziness, headaches, nausea, tiredness—get to fresh air immediately and seek medical attention.

Adapted from OSHA Quick Card 3277-10N-05, U.S. Department of Labor.



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