

Volcano CERT: Safe Generator Use

A portable generator is a great asset to have on hand when disaster strikes as a backup source of power if used carefully. Tropical storms can bring lightning and strong winds that can cause power outages that could last for days or even weeks in an extreme event.

Before using a portable generator, be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's instructions including proper grounding. Take precautions to avoid poisoning from the generator's toxic exhaust and to prevent electric shock, electrocution, and fire.

- Generator exhaust contains carbon monoxide, a poison you cannot see or smell. For this reason you should never use a generator inside a home, basement, or garage. Only use the generator outside, away from your home's windows, doors, and vents.
- Never plug the generator's power into a household outlet because the electricity can backflow into utility lines and energize them, creating a safety hazard for utility crews making repairs.
- Protect the generator from moisture and set it on a dry surface where water cannot reach it or puddle under it. Make sure your hands are dry before touching the generator.
- Always start or stop a generator when no electric appliances, tools, or lights are connected to it.
- Connect appliances to the generator using a heavy-duty extension cord designed for outdoor use. Check the cord to be sure it's free from cuts or tears and protect it from getting pinched if it passes through a window or doorway.
- Check the combined wattage of all the appliances you plan to power with the generator. Make sure the combined wattage of the appliances does not exceed the generator's capacity or the capacity of the extension cord they are plugged into.
- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool down. Never overfill the fuel tank and clean up any spilled gasoline.
- Store reserve fuel outside your home's living areas and away from any fuel-burning appliance. Only use containers designed for fuel storage.

Generators may only be safely connected to the house wiring using an approved power transfer switch. The transfer switch must be installed by a qualified electrician in accordance with the National Electrical Code and applicable state and local electrical codes.