

|  |
| --- |
| Power outage: using alternative fuel and electricity generation safely |
| Community information |

Using an alternative power supply during a power outage for cooking, lighting, heating or power can be extremely dangerous.

Carbon monoxide is invisible, and you cannot smell it. If it builds up in a home, garage or caravan it can cause sudden illness, loss of consciousness and death.

Protect yourself and your family from injury or death by following these safety tips.

## Power generators

Portable power generators are very useful, but if not used safely they can lead to:

* carbon monoxide poisoning from the engine exhaust
* electric shock or electrocution
* fire

Petrol or diesel-powered generators can produce carbon monoxide gas so **must only be used in a well-ventilated outdoor area** away from open windows and vents.

Householders must follow the instructions supplied with the generator to ensure safe operation. To prevent overloading of a generator, it is important to consider the generator’s rating (wattage). The total rating of appliances operating at the same time must be less than the rating of the generator.

Permanently installed standby generators are best suited for providing back-up power to the home.

**Only a licensed electrician should connect a permanent generator.**

## Using a portable generator safely

* **Never use a portable generator indoors**. Do not locate inside a home, garage, carport, basement, crawlspace or other enclosed or partially enclosed area, even with ventilation. Opening doors and windows will not prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide and other fumes indoors.
* **Always operate the generator outdoors** and well away from occupied spaces, windows or doorways.
* Read the manufacturer’s instructions before use.
* Do not overload the generator.
* Switch the generator off when refuelling or when not in use.

It is a good idea to install battery-operated carbon monoxide alarms in your home to alert you when carbon monoxide levels pose a health risk. Test the battery frequently and replace when needed.

## To avoid electric shock or electrocution

* Keep the generator dry and do not use it in the rain.
* To protect the generator from moisture, use it on a dry surface under an open canopy-like structure, such as a tarp held up on poles.
* Always dry your hands before touching the generator.

## To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

* Never use a gas stove or oven to heat a home.
* Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern or portable camping stove inside a home, tent or caravan.
* Never run a generator, pressure washer or any fuel-powered engine inside a basement, garage or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented.
* Keep vents and flues free of debris, especially if winds are high, as flying debris can block ventilation openings.
* Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer or any fuel-powered engine outside an open window, door or vent where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
* Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space such as a garage.
* If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak, get to fresh air immediately and get immediate medical advice.

## Refuelling a generator

* Only use the type of fuel recommended by the manufacturer.
* Make sure the generator is off and cool before refuelling. Petrol spilled on hot engine parts can catch fire.
* Store petrol or diesel outside, away from the home in a locked shed or other protected area.
* Do not store any fuel near a fuel-burning appliance (such as a natural gas water heater or near a car in a garage).

## Using appliances connected to a generator

If returning to a property that has been damaged by fire or strong winds, check the wiring and other electrical installations before connecting and turning on any appliances.

You should also:

* Plug appliances directly into the generator via a heavy duty, outdoor-rated extension cord.
* Use short extension leads that are in good condition and plugs that have all three prongs.
* Fully unwind extension leads from reels or drums.**Do not try to power the house wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet**. This can ‘back feed’ along the power lines and is extremely dangerous to you and your neighbours.

## **Further information**

* In an emergency call triple zero (000) for an ambulance.
* For information about safely using gas or electricity contact Energy Safe Victoria on 9203 9700 or visit the [Energy Safe Victoria Website](http://www.esv.vic.gov.au/) <www.esv.vic.gov.au>
* For information about the health effects of carbon monoxide exposure call NURSE-ON-CALL 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1300 60 60 24 or seek advice from your doctor.

## To stay informed about emergencies

* Go to [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au) or download the VicEmergency app.
* Tune into your local Emergency Broadcaster including ABC Local Radio, commercial and designated community radio stations, or Sky News TV.
* Follow VicEmergency on Twitter or Facebook.
* Phone the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226 (freecall). For help with English, phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 (freecall) and ask them to telephone the VicEmergency Hotline.

|  |
| --- |
| To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email environmental.healthunit@dhhs.vic.gov.auAuthorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, September 2020. Available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/emergency-type/natural-disasters>Translations available at <https://healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/>  |