



## Storm Disaster Safety: Advice for Homeowners

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As consumer reliance on electricity has increased, power outages have become a big issue when preparing for disasters. Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, lightning storms and high winds, have all killed and injured thousands in 2006. Economic losses from these events, especially in the Gulf Coast region, totaled billions of dollars. These natural disasters have left electrical dangers associated with downed power lines, portable electric generators and electrical wiring or appliances that have become wet. Each has caused many deaths and injuries.

"Portable electric generators are a good source of power during electrical outages. Generators that are improperly installed or operated can become deadly," noted Brett Brenner, president of the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFi).

In 1998 the Journal of Emergency Medicine indicated "carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning was accounted for up to an estimated 40,000 emergency department visits in the United States and is said to be the most common cause of poisoning death in the country."

Data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) indicated that 179 CO poisoning deaths associated with portable generators were reported to the CPSC in the years from 1990 to 2002, with no decrease in overall frequency during that time. However, in 2005 alone the CPSC received reports of at least 64 people who died from CO poisoning associated with portable generators.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFi) urges consumers to become more knowledgeable about electrical safety. These precautions can help keep you and your family safe from carbon monoxide poisoning from portable electric generators during and after disasters:

- Contact a licensed electrician to install your generator to make sure it meets local codes. Do not connect generators directly to household wiring without an appropriate transfer switch installed. Power from generators connected directly to household wiring can backfeed along power lines and electrocute anyone coming in contact with them, including lineworkers making repairs.
- Make sure your generator is properly grounded.
- Keep the generator dry.
- Make sure extension cords used with generators are rated for the load, and are free of cuts, worn insulation, and have three-pronged plugs.
- Do not overload the generator. A portable generator should be used only when necessary, and only to power essential equipment or appliances.
- Never operate the generator in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. Use carbon monoxide detectors in nearby enclosed spaces to monitor levels. Generators can produce high levels of carbon monoxide very quickly, which can be deadly.
- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) to help prevent electrocutions and electrical shock injuries.
- Make sure fuel for the generator is stored safely, away from living areas, in properly labeled containers, and away from fuel-burning appliances. Before re-fueling, always turn the generator off and let it cool down.
- Turn off all appliances powered by the generator before shutting down the generator.
- Keep children away from portable generators at all times.

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*Founded in 1994 through a joint effort between Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL), the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA), the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFi) is North America's only non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety in the home and workplace. ESFi is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by electrical manufacturers and distributors, independent testing laboratories, utilities, safety and consumer groups, and trade and labor associations. ESFi sponsors National Electrical Safety Month each May, and engages in public education campaigns and proactive media relations to help reduce property damage, personal injury and death due to electrical accidents. The Foundation does not engage in code or standard writing or lobbying and does not solicit individuals.*

For additional electrical safety information, visit the Foundation's Web site at [www.electrical-safety.org](http://www.electrical-safety.org) or call 703-841-3229.